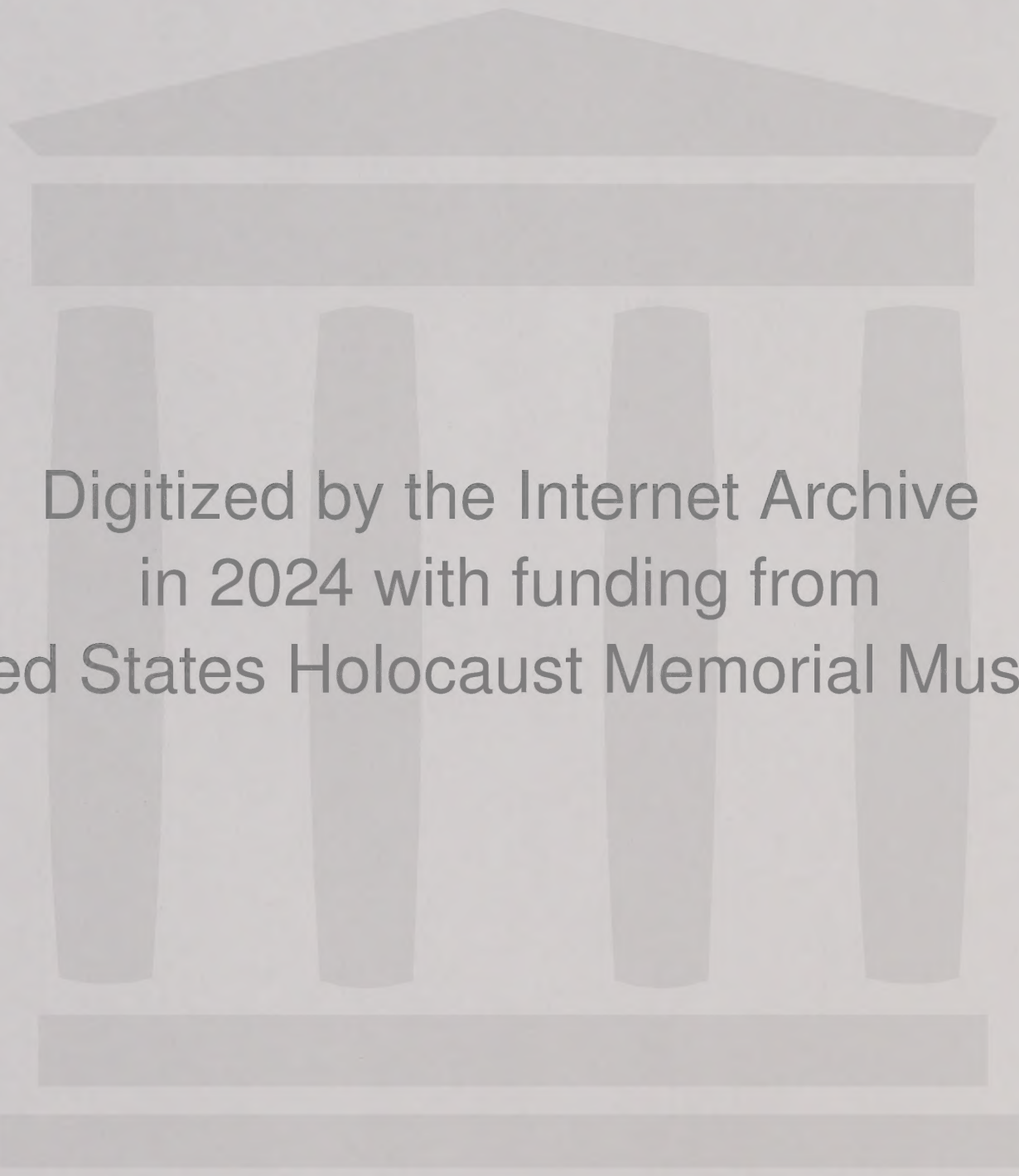




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NOTES FROM EXILE

By

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Introductory Remarks

For the American who learned Polish after World War II, the Polish language is a mystery. The Polish language is the language which was spoken in 1939, when the Soviet Union invaded Poland. The Polish language is the language which was spoken in 1939, when the Soviet Union invaded Poland. The Polish language is the language which was spoken in 1939, when the Soviet Union invaded Poland.

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Dedicated to my uncle, an honest and courageous man, respected and liked by those whose lives he touched, a devoted husband and father, an idealist and a communist in his youth whose eyes, like those of many others, were opened by the brutal reality of that fall in 1939, who died for his beliefs and his country in a prison camp somewhere in the vastness of the Soviet Union. May he rest in peace wherever he is buried. (*Niech mu ziemia lekka będzie*.)*

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A family gathering devoted to the only married husband of my mother, who was not married. All those who were present were present. All those who were present were present. All those who were present were present. All those who were present were present. All those who were present were present.

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(Footnote):

* In answer to her numerous inquiries regarding the date of my uncle's death as well as the place of his internment, his daughter received a letter dated October 13, 1989 from the Military Prosecutor, Lt.Col. Sh. S. Mukhametov, notifying her that my uncle died of bilateral pulmonary tuberculosis on March 5, 1952 in Dubravlag. When my uncle came down with tuberculosis, the location of Dubravlag and the place where he was buried were not mentioned in the official documents on which the letter was based. According to Avraham Shifrin, author of *The First Guidebook to Prisons and Concentration Camps of the Soviet Union* (Bantam Books, p. 104), Dubravlag was the name of a chain of labor camps along the railroad route from Pot'ma to Temnikov in the Mordovian Autonomous Socialist Republic.

Introductory Remarks

For the Americans the Second World War started on December 7, 1941, on "*the day that will live in infamy*." For the Russians the Second World War started on June 22, 1941, when the German armies crossed the western frontiers of the Soviet Union, only two years after the USSR signed a pact of friendship and nonaggression with Nazi Germany.

The truth of the matter is that the Second World War started in the early morning hours of September 1, 1939, when the German armies launched a surprise attack on Poland from the north, west and south. The Luftwaffe blasted Polish airfields and incapacitated the Polish air force. By September 5, the German armies approached Warsaw. That evening, the government spokesman, Col. Umiastowski, made a request over the Warsaw radio. In the name of the government, he asked that those capable of bearing arms leave the capital and proceed east to join the Polish army units on the Bug River where a defense line was to be established. Thousands of people, including myself and my best friend, Tolek, promptly set out on foot. They crowded the bridges over the Vistula River in order to make it across before the air raids began. The Luftwaffe started bombing promptly at six o'clock in the morning and stopped just as promptly at five o'clock in the afternoon.

After almost two weeks of wandering under constant strafing and bombardment by diving Stukas, Tolek and I found ourselves in Pinsk, a small town in the eastern part of Poland. We decided to settle there and "wait out the war." But first things first: we were in dire need of a bath and a shave. We had not taken off our clothes for almost two weeks, and had not shaved during that time either.

A kindly passerby directed us to the only municipal bathhouse in town. The caretaker, an old Jewish woman, was not too friendly ("All those dirty refugees crowding into our little town!"), but agreed to accommodate us when we tipped her handsomely. We took a room with two large bathtubs, because we decided that, if we talked to each other while we soaked off our two-weeks worth of dirt, we would not fall asleep and drown. "Don't take too long." The caretaker said before leaving us. "Tonight is *Erev Rosh Hashana* (the beginning of the two-day celebration of the Hebrew New Year) and we close early."

It was about 2:00 p.m. when we shaved and immersed ourselves in the tubs filled with pleasantly warm water. We talked about our experiences since leaving Warsaw and tried to make some plans for the nearest future, like finding a place to live in Pinsk. The next thing we became aware of was a loud banging on the room's door accompanied by the shouting of the caretaker: "Get out! Get out! It is late!" The water was cold. We looked at our watches. It was 4:00 p.m. Obviously we had fallen asleep, and, fortunately, did not slip in the bathtubs and drown. We dressed, apologized to the caretaker for making her stay longer than she had originally planned, got a few addresses of possible lodgings from her and left.

With some difficulty we finally managed to rent a room with a Jewish family, consisting of the head of the household, his wife, his mother-in-law, and three teenage daughters. They owned a small dry goods store and were very happy to have both the additional income from renting a small cubbyhole to us (we paid a month's rent in advance), and two strong young men who could help with household chores. We were also invited to join the family at the holiday supper. That evening, as we listened to the news broadcast from some German radio transmitter we heard the speaker announce: "We know very well that all the rich Jews with their gold, jewels and American dollars are in Pinsk. Tomorrow morning at six o'clock we will bomb the town."

That morning promptly at five o'clock, Tolek and I left Pinsk on foot walking parallel to a railroad track leading south toward Rumania, and joined up with some chance companions, somewhere between the towns of Pinsk and Sarny. The day was hot and dry, like all of the days since the beginning of the war. It was noontime and our little group decided to rest in the shadow of a haystack. Suddenly the buzzing of flies was joined by the sound of approaching airplanes; they did not "sound German." The people under the haystack looked expectedly toward the sound. "It must be British help," someone remarked excitedly. The big lumbering planes flew over the haystack, the five-pointed red stars of the Soviet Union on their wings. They were Soviet and not British planes. The people under the haystack

looked bewildered. Not a word was uttered. The date was September 17, 1939.

Within a week or two life in the "liberated" Western Ukraine and Western Belarus (as those territories were promptly renamed) became more or less normal. As soon as the trains began to operate, Tolek and I went to Wilno to continue our medical studies at the university. We were admitted into the program but shortly thereafter decided to leave the city when it became known that the Soviet Union would return that part of the former Polish territory to Lithuania. We expected the Lithuanians to massacre the Poles, so we left Wilno and went to Lwow. Our goal was still to continue our studies which had been interrupted by the outbreak of hostilities and also to wait for the war to end. The Committee on Admissions rejected our applications, because we were considered to be "Polish capitalists." (Tolek's father was a physician's assistant and mine was a surgeon).

At that time Tolek decided to steal across the frontier, and return to his family in Warsaw. He was caught by a Soviet border patrol, and no trace of him was ever found. I worked as a ditch digger in Lwow until the fateful night of June 27, 1940. Upon my arrival in the United States in the beginning of 1947, I recorded some of my recollections of the period from June 27, 1940 until the fall of 1944.

Journey Into The Unknown

After the severe winter of 1940, when people froze while standing in lines to buy a loaf of bread and some cooking oil or *ersatz* honey, when a cart of firewood cost 400 rubles, (*i.e.* as much as the monthly salary of an experienced toolmaker), Lvov seemed to come to life under the warmth of the spring sun. The parks and boulevards of this beautiful city which was known as "Little Vienna," became lush and green. However, instead of joy and peace, the spring of 1940 brought troubles, sorrow and tears to the hundreds of thousands of people living in the so-called Western Ukraine and Western Belarus.

At that time I found myself in Lwow together with the family of one of my paternal uncles. The family consisted of my uncle, his wife and a six-year old daughter. Just like tens of thousands of others escaping the onslaught of the German armies, we found ourselves in territories occupied by the Soviet Union. In the beginning of May 1940 the refugees in those occupied territories were forced to make a choice. One option was to accept being processed for a Soviet "internal passport." This personal identification document automatically meant that the holder accepted Soviet citizenship. The other alternative was to return to the territories under German occupation. The decision was extremely difficult and people walked around like in a daze because of their preoccupation with having to make this decision within a few weeks. We decided to return to Warsaw; *i.e.* to the territory under German occupation. After several months of life in Lwow under Soviet occupation, we realized what it would mean to accept Soviet citizenship. Thousands of people who had voluntarily signed up during the winter of 1940 for work in the factories and coal mines of Kurbas and Donbas, subsequently escaped by traveling under railroad cars or on their roofs. They returned to Lvov and told of the poverty, the abysmal standard of living, and the constant fear in which the average Soviet citizen lived. We also learned a lot from our conversations with the Russians, and we observed a lot ourselves.

The Russian director of the office where my uncle worked told him quite openly: "The passports which they are giving contain 'Article 11.' In the Soviet Union such passports are given to prostitutes and to people deprived of citizens' rights. Don't take those passports because you will never be able to travel or to live in even the smallest town. Throughout your lives you will remain in some little village or hamlet. For you, as an engineer, it is the 'kiss of death'."

From the behavior of both the military and civilian Russians in the city, we could easily draw conclusions about the quality of life in the interior of the country. Within several weeks, like locusts, they cleaned the city of everything, including food supplies that would have lasted the inhabitants of Lwow for months. They used to buy everything: wrist watches and clocks, typewriters and cars, bicycles, motorcycles and phonographs. They bought clothes and shoes by the dozen regardless of size, quality or style. Even pins, needles, buttons and thread disappeared from the stores. The Soviet military could afford everything because they had received six-months pay as a bonus and continued to draw their monthly salary. Consequently, emptied stores closed and all commerce moved into private apartments, and onto the "black market." Lwow became a typical Soviet city with closed stores (or if open, with empty shelves) and with very active illegal trade. Those were the indications of the Soviet "plentiful life" which we observed.

The Russians' crass behavior mirrored their lack of culture and upbringing. In restaurants they ordered everything listed on the menu at once: appetizers, soup together with dessert and main dishes together with beer and cocoa. They put their knives in their mouths and held their forks and knives in their hands as if they were ready to slaughter a bull and not just to cut a piece of meat. The wives of the Red Army officers used to attend the theater or concerts in nightgowns, assuming they were evening dresses. In the May Day parade one could spot Russian men dressed in pajamas which they considered to be a kind of a "May Outfit." The traditional May Day attire for men consisted of white shirts, white slacks and white tennis shoes, the so-called "May Costume." Because pajamas resembled this light colored dress, they were considered appropriate to be worn in public by the Russians who did not know any better.

Once my uncle bought a roll of blue toilet paper on his way to work and brought it into the office. The Russian head engineer inquired about the function of this particular item. When told the purpose the paper served, the engineer asked why it was blue. My uncle answered facetiously that the paper comes in different colors: pink, brown, blue or white, depending which color is becoming to a particular face. As a

consequence of this conversation, the head engineer also bought a roll of toilet paper but used it for rolling cigarettes. The Russians smoked finely chopped homegrown tobacco which they rolled in pieces of newspaper. For some reason this tobacco did not burn in cigarette paper. I do not know whether or not it burned in toilet paper because I never tried it. Presumably it did, since the Russian engineer used it successfully. Incidentally, commercial Russian cigarettes were very good but at that time difficult to obtain.

Another case illustrating life in the Soviet Union happened to friends of ours. They occupied an apartment whose owner escaped to Rumania. One of the rooms in this apartment was occupied by a young air force officer and his wife. Our friends noticed that every morning before the officer went to work both he and his wife locked themselves in the toilet for several minutes. Then they would get out and the husband went to work while the wife started on some chores. Our friends became curious and one morning when the couple went into the toilet and locked the door behind them, one of our friends peeked in through the transom. Imagine his surprise when he saw the wife standing on the toilet with the toilet seat raised and going calmly about her physiological needs while her husband was holding her so she would not slip off the rounded sides of the toilet bowl. They were not familiar with toilets where one sits instead of squatting. Another officer used the toilet bowl as a wash basin and complained that the wash basins in Poland are poorly designed because one must constantly pull the handle in order to make the water run.

The Russians would, of course, never admit to their ignorance. The general knowledge level of these people seemed to come from a *Short Course of the All-Union Bolshevik Party* manual. Whenever they were asked whether or not this or that was available in the Soviet Union, their standard answer was "We have everything." Soon people started making jokes. "Do you have Copenhagen in your country?" they were asked. "Most certainly." was the answer of the poor ignorant Soviet citizen stuffed full of propaganda, "and you can get carloads of it." "And do you have oranges?" asked the jokers. "Well, not yet but we are building a giant orange factory in the Crimea."

These examples of the situation and the quality of life in the Soviet Union made us, as average Europeans, very uneasy and not at all eager to accept Soviet citizenship passports. In addition, people were deathly afraid of the militia and the NKVD (presently known as the KGB). On the other hand we did not know the Germans and what they were capable of doing. This was to become known later during their occupation of Europe.

And so, in May 1940 when the word spread that a German Commission had arrived in the territories occupied by the Soviets and together with representatives of the Soviet authorities was registering war refugees for return to the German side, thousands upon thousands of people chose to return. In Lwow, in front of the NKVD headquarters on Zielona Street, lines of people waited day and night to register. My uncle with his family and myself also registered and were in the last hundred of the eleventh thousand. Shortly thereafter the registration was closed when the figure reached twelve thousand people.

Nothing happened for a few weeks. We waited for the announcement of the departure date but deep inside did not believe that the return to our homes would actually take place. And our premonitions turned out to be true. On June 20, 1940, we noticed a lot of militia and NKVD men in the city. First single men of all ages were arrested. Every day fewer friends and acquaintances came to visit us. People were simply disappearing. All night one could hear trucks driving down the empty streets. Every night my aunt and I stood on the balcony of our room, watched this weird traffic and began to realize what to expect. Then it actually happened when during the night of June 27 a truck halted in front of our apartment building. After a short while the bell rang and two militiamen led by a noncom entered the apartment and then our room. They unholstered their revolvers and barked the "hands up" order. We obeyed. The militiamen searched the pockets of our pajamas, ordered us to sit on our beds, to drop our hands and make no move. We asked them to be as quiet as they could so as not to wake my little cousin. They obliged and began a thorough search. After a short time the room looked like it had been hit by a tornado. Every piece of paper and every item was thoroughly examined. They found a one-dollar bill. "What is it?", the noncom asked. "American money worth about 5.30 rubles." I answered. At that time an American dollar was worth several hundred rubles on the "black market." But those militiamen had never heard

about American dollars. During the search of my suit, a cigarette case in one of the pockets in my trousers made a metallic noise. Frightened, the militiaman threw the trousers to me, aimed his revolver at me and ordered me to empty the pocket which I did. He asked about the use of this particular item. I opened the case and the militiamen calmed down assured that it was not a bomb. At that moment the incident reminded me of a story told to me by one of my friends. While illegally crossing the frontier from the German side to the Soviet occupied territory, he had been caught by Soviet border guards. They took him to their officer and one of the guards placed all of the items taken from my friend on the desk in front of the officer. One of the items was a thermos bottle with tea. Apparently, it was not tightly closed because all of a sudden the thermos bottle started hissing. The guards led by the officer ran outside and through the window ordered their "prisoner" to open this "dangerous bomb," only to realize that it was filled with ... tea.

In the meantime the search of our room was completed. The noncom carefully recorded all of our personal data (the umpteenth time during our eight-month stay in Lwow!), ordered us to pack our belongings but not to exceed 100 kg per person and informed us that we would be resettled because we were illegally living in the 200 km border zone without Soviet documents. Only after having packed our belongings did we wake up my little cousin. She started crying when she saw the armed men in the room, but we managed to calm her down. Washing up, getting dressed and even going to the bathroom was done under the watchful eyes of a militiaman with a drawn revolver. It was daylight when, assisted by the militiamen, we started carrying our things downstairs to the waiting truck. Another family was already there. Under NKVD escort the truck started in the direction of one of Lvov's railroad stations. Despite the early morning hour (around six o'clock) the traffic was unbelievable. Trucks loaded with people and their belongings darted in all directions because there were several railroad stations in Lwow. The militia and the NKVD patrols stopped all of the pedestrians and examined their documents. Anyone without a valid Soviet five-year passport (Soviet passports had to be renewed every five years) was immediately taken to the railroad station.

When our truck arrived at the railroad station, the noncom handed us and the search reports to an NKVD officer, who ordered to take us to the assigned freight car, and transfer our belongings to it. I looked around. Several trains consisting of freight cars and surrounded by NKVD troops were standing at the various platforms. Numerous NKVD patrols were marching around. Decades later when I read about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and about the *Umschlagplatz*, the railroad siding where the Jews were loaded on trains to be taken to extermination camps in Majdanek, Treblinka or Sobibor, I recalled the scene at the railroad station in Lvov on that June morning. There was, however, one big difference. The Lvov scene had none of the bestial brutality that existed on the *Umschlagplatz*.

There were already sixty adults and children in the car to which we were directed. Under normal conditions freight cars were to hold "eight horses or forty persons." When we came all of the platforms for sleeping, made out of rough wooden boards, and all of the spaces along the walls of the car were occupied when. We settled across from the car's door and next to a hole in the floor with a short pipe sticking out of it, which was to be used as a toilet by the passengers. Our appeals to the guards to have us transferred to another car fell on deaf ears. We put our blankets on the floor and tried to collect our thoughts. The passengers in the car were a mixed group including a few lawyers, a dentist, a butcher, a journalist, and a very old Jewish couple whose only baggage was a sack with prayer books and other religious paraphernalia. Inside the car the air was heavy and hot, the noise was unbearable. Outside it was a beautiful hot day, that June 28, 1940. It was impossible to move between the bodies and the baggage. One of the women fainted every few minutes, children cried, and the old bearded Jew prayed all of the time in his corner. We were prohibited from leaving the car even for a moment just to get some fresh air. In the course of the day three more single men were put into our car. One of them, a sixty-year old Czech, "parked" himself on the improvised toilet where he sat throughout the whole trip. He would only move for the night when he could squeeze somewhere onto a platform to get some sleep or during the day when a passenger had to use the "toilet."

The train stayed at the station under the burning June sun all that day and through the night. When we woke up the next morning, the old Jewish couple was gone, as if they had disappeared into thin air. No wonder the old man had prayed all day. It must have helped! They obviously took advantage of the dark night to escape despite all the NKVD troop cordons and patrols. The sack with sacred books was all

that was left in the corner. Also a young couple somehow escaped leaving all their baggage to their friends. Quite a few people escaped from the transport that night. When the "action" ended in a few days, they left their hiding places, accepted Soviet passports without an "Article 11" and started normal lives only to perish a year later at the hands of the Ukrainians and the Germans. Only a very small percent of those people survived by escaping into the interior of Russia after the beginning of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union.

Before noon on June 30, 1940, our train, consisting of approximately fifty cars, started on its way toward the unknown. When the train passed under an overpass, crowds of Lwow inhabitants cried and shouted goodbyes. Loaves of bread, rolls and small packages of all kinds of food were thrown through the open doors of the cars by the people standing on the overpass. Once the city was left behind, the people in the car started to talk. Those people of various ages, sexes, ideologies and professions, accidentally thrown together by fate, agreed on one point: it had never even crossed their minds that the Soviets were capable of organizing the mass resettlement of so many people.

The Trip

Already during the first hours of the trip all of the occupants of the car became acquainted with one another. Later, after their arrival in the settlement deep in the Soviet Union, and due to the difficult months spent together in the labor camp many of those acquaintanceships turned into true friendships. In fact, we met several of those friends again six years later after our return to Poland.

The Mayers family, the largest in the car, hailed from somewhere near Krakow. The family consisted of an old mother, brave and wise, three sons, a daughter with a little boy, her husband, Joe, and the wife of one of the sons with her little child. There was another family from the same area near Krakow consisting of two handsome young men in their twenties and a father who, as my uncle said, "looked like a retired circus clown." An older couple, the Kochs, with a young newly married daughter whose husband, a native of Lwow, remained behind. That family caused a constant commotion because the mother frequently had seizures or fainting spells. When she regained her wits, she drank vodka.

Two brothers from Krakow, Jay and Jim, with their young wives, occupied a "space" on one of the sleeping platforms at the end of the car. They strongly resembled each other and because both had black mustaches, we nicknamed them "the beetles." The space next to them was occupied by Lou, a young lawyer from Warsaw whose wife, a Rumanian citizen, remained in Lwow with their little son. But of all of the families in our car, the people who most deserve to be mentioned were a couple with a thirteen-year old boy, Freddie. The father, a giant of a man and an owner of several clothing stores, became the top carpenter in the camp. The mother, a little unimpressive woman, became a sensation in the settlement when, exactly nine months after our arrival in the settlement, she gave birth to a baby girl.

I guess at this point that my own family also deserves a few words. My uncle, a mechanical engineer by profession, was a very bright and witty person. He made friends easily and some of them became quite devoted to him. My aunt was a thin and sickly woman. She was also bright and very witty. Their daughter, my cousin, was a very pretty seven-year old who had inherited her parents' wit.

Among the single men in our car two bear mentioning. One of them, an editor of one of the Jewish newspapers in Warsaw, was very bright and intelligent but terribly boring. We nicknamed him "The Editor." The other one was Polana. I must devote more than just a few cursory remarks to the latter because he was an individual who would do literally anything for my uncle and for our family, and we had extensive proof of his commitment to us throughout, I can safely say, our friendship with him.

Our acquaintance with Polana started both strangely and rather prosaically. He occupied an upper sleeping platform and his clothes were so full of lice that the passengers underneath him were subjected to what amounted to be a "lice deluge." It was no wonder that they yelled and objected to it. Within a few hours of the train's departure from Lwow, quarrels started in the car which was by now as hot as an oven and as noisy as a beehive. My uncle had a friendly talk with Polana and convinced him to throw out his filthy clothes. He did. We gave him swimming trunks and a shirt, and everything was fine. Since that time Polana always sat with us. He was an eighteen-year old lad, average height, very strong and extremely agile. He had Negroid features, mean bloodshot eyes and a stutter. His father was a butcher in a small town near Bedzin. In Lwow he "operated" on the "black market," sometimes as a buyer, sometimes as a seller, at times as a middleman and not infrequently as a thief. He was a simple man in his behavior and was good when someone was good to him, but could be mean and vengeful when crossed. After the lice incident Polana "adopted" our family and simply worshiped my uncle.

After a day or two the first proof of Polana's loyalty to us became evident. The train stopped at a station and our car happened to stop across from a warehouse full of folding beds presumably for military hospitals. As soon as the train stopped, the people started jumping out of the cars, totally disregarding the armed guards in order to get some drinking water and to relieve themselves. In the ensuing commotion, Polana stole one of the beds and brought it into the car. "Otherwise the Mistress and the Miss won't have a place to sleep," he announced stuttering. As a punishment because the people had jumped out of the cars without the permission of the guards, the doors of all the cars were closed and latched from the outside by the guards. In fifteen

minutes there was hardly any air in the car. Polana pushed himself partially out of a small window below the roof of the car, lifted the latch with a hook made out of someone's coat hanger and we opened the door. No sooner had we done this when one of the guards came running and again latched the door. Polana repeated his previous trick. This time the guard became furious, yelling the most vile swear words and threatening to seal the doors. We objected most vigorously telling him that nobody gave him the right to asphyxiate us in that car. Finally, he relented and we were permitted to open the doors no more than the width of his rifle butt. After an hour, a "representative" and two people with some containers, buckets, etc. were taken from each car under armed guard to bring food for the people in their cars. We were given bread, sausage, hard candy and some small salty fish. We kept the food except the fish which everybody threw out as soon as the train left the station.

The next day the train crossed the old Polish-Soviet frontier. Torn out old border markers were still lying next to the tracks. We were traveling through the Ukraine. The heat was unbearable. People began fainting several times a day and suffering from diarrhea. In addition, lice appeared and all of the children developed eczema. People were constantly bickering and arguing, and frequently came to blows. The fights were stopped by the older people in the car. The train never stopped in the larger cities. It passed through Kiev, Kharkov and Saratov in the middle of the night. It stopped only at small stations or in open fields. I remember once when it stopped in the Ukrainian steppes. As far as one could see there was nothing but a flat space dotted with some bushes. People jumped out of the cars. Instantly the field looked as if it were covered by ants. Suddenly all of the people disappeared and only the bushes remained. A few minutes elapsed and the bushes came to life. First a head showed above a bush, then shoulders, and finally a person who subsequently returned to the car now without stomach cramps. On the other side of the tracks the view was different because there were no bushes. The people could only turn their backs toward the train like ostriches who hide their heads in the sand and hope that nobody sees them.

Those were our main diversions during the day. The nights were also eventful. Whenever the train stopped at some small station to pick up water and fuel, the commandant of the transport received orders with the name of the next stop. Two or three guards entered each car and started counting the people, their only source of light being a piece of candle. The counting procedure was as follows: all of the passengers were directed to one half of the car and then they were singly permitted to cross to the other half. Despite such strict control, every night the number of passengers in our car turned out to be different not because more people moved in or because some escaped. We just took delight in confusing the guards who were obviously extremely weak in arithmetic.

After traveling for a few days and nights, one night we arrived in Penza, a city in the European part of the Soviet Union, located on the Sura River. We were awakened at two o'clock in the morning and told to get dressed. Two people with buckets were taken from each car under guard "to get dinner." We were given some kind of soup and grits. This was the only hot meal we had during the trip. It was planned to be a dinner but plans in the Soviet Union get fouled up (as we discovered throughout our stay there) and we ate that "dinner" at two o'clock in the morning. Traveling in cars unmercifully heated by the sun during the day, without the possibility of washing up, with no boiled drinking water and in confined quarters, exhausted everyone completely.

On the ninth night the train stopped at a small station. At dawn the car doors opened and we were ordered to transfer into trucks which drove up to each car. We had no idea where we were. Polana went reconnoitering and returned after some time with a few hard rolls which he managed to buy for us. He told us the name of the town where we found ourselves and that it was on the Volga River. The name of the town was totally unfamiliar to us. In the meantime the trucks pulled up to our car and several families with their belongings were loaded into each one of them. An NKVD officer accompanied by a few coworkers loudly read names from a list and looked at each person very intensely. After each truck was checked and double checked, the column of trucks moved at top speed through the town. The few pedestrians seemed more surprised by the number of trucks than by their cargo. After a few minutes we arrived at a river dock where we were transferred to a large motorboat. Thus our single transport was divided into a few smaller ones. The approximately 660 people with baggage on our boat crowded the deck. Only mothers with small children were permitted under the deck where there were a few wooden stools.

As soon as the boat pulled away from the dock it started to rain. We were given some filthy torn tarpaulins to protect ourselves from the deluge. We covered what at that time seemed most valuable to us; our baggage. We traveled twenty-four hours under torrential rain with no place even to sit down. The next morning we pulled up to a small wooden dock, upstream from where we had boarded the boat and on the opposite side of the river which turned out to be the Volga. Above the river bank at a height of three stories one could see a settlement and a narrow gauge train consisting of several flatcars. We were ordered to transfer our baggage from the boat onto the flatcars. It was a backbreaking task considering the height of the river bank and the large heavy trunks brought by some of the "resettled" families. While there was a wooden incline from the river bank to the flatcars undoubtedly prepared in anticipation of the newcomers, it did not make the baggage any lighter.

When everybody was finally settled on the flatcars, an NKVD officer ordered us to proceed "one flatcar at a time" to a mess hall. Polana, who had disappeared after helping us with our baggage, reappeared with information about our location. We were in a small settlement on the east bank of the Volga River somewhere between the cities of Kazan and Gorki. Through it timber was floated down the river to the Caspian Sea. Again we did not know where we would be taken from there. There was no time to think. We went to the mess hall for dinner. The mess hall was located in a wooden barracks and the inside looked like any other workers' mess hall in every settlement in the Soviet Union: piles of dirt, vegetable and potato peels, and clouds of flies. The counter was filthy and black from flies sitting on it as well as on three plates with a vegetable salad in a cabinet behind dirty cracked glass doors. The walls were decorated with large portraits of Stalin, Lenin and the Marshals Voroshilov and Budienny. Various slogans were painted on old newspapers with red paint and hung under the ceiling along all the walls. Among the slogans were the obligatory "Long Live the All-Union Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks); the Party of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin." The portraits, as well as the slogans, seemed to be favored by the flies as resting places.

Our family sat down at one of the tables scaring a swarm of flies which took off in all directions. Without being asked the waitress brought four plates with soup and four wooden spoons. There was no point in asking for any other food. There was nothing else to eat. Since we were in a mess hall on the banks of the Volga River, it was obvious that the soup had to be a fish chowder ("ukha"). Our first impression was that of utter shock. In front of each of us was a bowl with two fish heads in stinking water, a few pieces of a raw scallion and no trace of any fat. The second impression, the taste of the "ukha," was even worse. Dirty dish water in the worst "greasy spoon" eatery would have been a delicacy in comparison with the soup we were served. Nevertheless we decided to have some of that soup because we had had no hot food since the "dinner" in the middle of the night in Penza. We also had considerable difficulty eating with the wooden spoons so prevalent in Russian villages. Carved by hand from birch, the spoon is round and between two and three inches in diameter. Because of its size it is impossible to put the spoon in one's mouth. Consequently, one is forced to pour the soup from the spoon into the mouth. Since we had no experience whatsoever with this utensil, after our first attempt at using it our mouths and noses were covered with soup. When we got up from the table, the "ukha" dripped down our necks and under the shirts. The cost of this "meal" amounted to just a few rubles.

When people took their places on the flatcars, the train started on its way. First it traveled between the river and a forest. Then at an industrial settlement with a larger train station and a few sawmills, the train turned into a virgin forest with thirty-meter tall pine trees. Through the trees one could see either marshes or glades red with raspberries. We passed a few barracks and a settlement. At dusk the train stopped at the end of the line, in a settlement in the forest.

The Labor Camp

An NKVD noncom and four militiamen ordered us to occupy the barracks and to unload our baggage. People jumped off of the flatcars and ran toward the settlement to secure better barracks. It was not an easy task to get off of the flatcars because after the downpour, which we had encountered traveling up the river, there were big puddles of water everywhere and the mud was ankle deep. Polana was one of the first to jump off of our flatcar and after a while he sent his comrade from the sleeping platform in the freight car, "The Editor", with a message that "living quarters have been secured." My uncle and I went to survey the situation. The room was in a barracks located approximately two hundred meters from the train track. One could reach the barracks using a gangplank two boards wide and twenty meters long. The boards were placed from one tree stump to the next, above a bog probably five thousand square meters in area. The barracks was made out of wood and stood on wooden piles. There were two entrances. One led into a common kitchen from which there were doors leading to three individual rooms separated by walls made out of single boards which did not reach the ceiling. The other entrance led into a hallway from which one could enter two rooms. The three rooms in the larger part of the barracks were occupied by the lawyer, Lou, and "the beetles" with their wives, our family and the Kochs with their daughter, Rhoda. The smaller part of the barracks was occupied by a couple from Krakow with an infant, Freddie with his parents, and three single men: Polana, "The Editor" and another fellow.

With Polana's help we transferred our baggage to the new quarters, spread bed sheets on the straw which covered the floor of the room and, without getting undressed, went to sleep. After the ten-day journey, filthy, full of lice, covered with sores and weakened by dysentery, we found ourselves "somewhere" in the Soviet Union. The first night was memorable not only for us but also for the remaining 650 people in our camp as undoubtedly were the first nights for all of the hundreds of thousands of brutally resettled people from the eastern territories of Poland. That night we were attacked by swarms of mosquitoes and an unbelievably large number of bedbugs. All night long the buzzing of mosquitoes kept us awake, while the bedbugs attacked us from the floor and by "parachuting" down on us from the ceiling. We removed them from our faces by the handful. In the morning, sleepy, bitten and discouraged, we "declared" an all out war against our tormentors, the insects.

We built a big bonfire in front of our barracks on which we boiled water in a teakettle and poured the boiling water on the walls, the ceilings and the floors of the barracks as well as on the iron beds which had been distributed from the warehouse. After several days of this "treatment" the bedbugs disappeared. In order to spare ourselves from persecution by mosquitoes, we burned wet tree bark in empty cans from some canned foods which we had brought with us from Lwow. This produced a thick irritating smoke, which kept the mosquitoes away. However we, the barracks' inhabitants, ended up with red and tearing eyes. It was impossible to close the windows for the night because of the heat outside, so we slept in a smoky but mosquito-free room.

The women had an additional headache, namely cooking. As I have already mentioned, there was a common kitchen in the barracks with a Russian stove, the main part of any village cabin in Russia. The stove was built out of bricks and shaped like a cube. It was a little over five feet high and empty inside. The flue was located in the front part of the oven. When wood was burnt deep inside the oven, the smoke and hot gases escaped through the front part of the oven into the chimney. Pots were placed in front of the burning wood using a special contraption, which was shaped like a two-pronged pitchfork with semicircular prongs and a very long handle. Under those cooking conditions our aluminum and enameled pots soon burned through. In order to cook in a Russian oven it was imperative to have round cast iron pots called *chugun*. These pots were narrow at the bottom and widened toward the top so that the cook could slip the "pitchfork" at the bottom of the *chugun* and by lifting it hold the pot off the floor of the oven and thus move it to another spot. Needless to say our women, not familiar with those cooking utensils, were heartbroken and many meals got spilled inside the oven!

After three days of "rest" which permitted us to get settled, the peal of a bell located in the front of the fire house called everyone to a meeting. When we gathered in front of the administration office, the head of the settlement who was also its industrial manager, and the NKVD commandant told us a few rather interesting tidbits. The settlement was one of thousands belonging to the Volga Lumber Industrial

Region. It was a part of the Central Lumber Industrial Administration of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, which in turn was administered by the National Commissariat (present day Ministry) of Communication. We were to work in the forest as prisoners guarded by the NKVD men. Each one of us was sentenced to 3-5 years of imprisonment for not possessing a valid Soviet passport, for illegally crossing the frontier of the Soviet Union, etc. We were tried and sentenced by the so-called "Moscow Three (*troika*)."

In other words we were tried and sentenced *in absentia*. All this sounded rather strange to those of us brought up in a democratic country. We demonstrated our surprise, helplessness and anger by hurling all kinds of vile epithets at our captors. At this point the enraged NKVD commandant yelled: "Despite your sentences, even when your time is over you will remain here for the rest of your lives, you will die here and your carcasses will rot on the Red Hill." The Red Hill was the burial place of the settlement. I must also point out that in the Russian language as in many other Slavic languages, different words are used to denote the death of a human (more dignified) and the death of an animal (less dignified). The commandant used the words for death and dying that are commonly used in reference to animals. Continuing his remarks the commandant yelled: "There will not be any Poland ever! You are a bunch of capitalists, bourgeois and Polish *pany* (gentry)." His further remarks were drowned by our yelling: "We did not ask you to bring us here! You yourselves will die in this God forsaken place! Poland did exist and will exist!" and at this point the crowd started singing the Polish national anthem "Poland is not lost yet" ("*Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła*").

When the crowd finally calmed down, the manager announced that the next morning at seven o'clock everyone was to gather in front of the administration barracks from where the group will be escorted to work in the forest. "There are three types of work"-the manager continued-"Tree cutting, the hauling of logs to the narrow gauge railroad siding using horse power and the loading of logs on the flatcars. We will select the people and organize them into teams. Each team will consist of several persons with a foreman heading it. The foreman will be responsible for his team's work and tools. You will be paid for your work according to the pay scale adopted throughout the Soviet Union. You will receive further instructions tomorrow."

After the manager finished his speech, some of the "future woodcutters and carters" addressed the crowd. There was a lot of yelling and swearing about many immediate and vital problems, relating to eating and sleeping. Consequently, the manager promised to organize a team of stove fitters who would remake "Russian ovens" into normal wood burning kitchen stoves and a team of carpenters who would repair the barracks, build bunk beds, etc. When the meeting was over, we went to the warehouse and were given several household items. Our family received three straw mattresses, a tea kettle made out of thin sheet metal, a pail, and a rather unusual contraption for washing up called "*umyvalnik*." It is a small container for holding water made out of sheet metal and equipped with a hole in the bottom. A pin, the size of a pencil, flattened at both ends and situated in that hole, acted as a valve. If one wanted to wash up, he/she pushed upward on the pin, the "valve" opened and water ran out. When the pin was left undisturbed, the "valve" is closed and no water came out. The quality of all the containers made out of sheet metal was extremely poor and they all leaked. Even the kerosene lamp, which we received, leaked. We were also given a three by four inch piece of cheesecloth to use in place of a missing windowpane. It was supposed to keep the mosquitoes out but let the air in. The mosquitoes were kept out, but so was the air because the openings were just too small to let sufficient air through. As my uncle and I were returning from the warehouse loaded with our new acquisitions, he got a brilliant idea just when we were crossing the gangplank over the bog. He said to me with a twinkle in his eyes: "Tomorrow I will go to the manager and suggest that we dry the bog by digging one main ditch with a few smaller ones joining it. At least there would be fewer mosquitoes." It was a great idea especially since it would put off our laboring in the forest at least for a while.

Next morning everyone gathered in front of the administration barracks. Each person was registered, asked his/her profession and directed to a proper "forest master" who was in charge of either cutting the trees, hauling them, or loading them on flatcars. A few people who said they were stove fitters were organized into the "stove fitters team" and assigned to remaking the Russian ovens. Two carpenters added a few of their friends to the "carpentry team." When my uncle's turn came to be registered, he presented to the manager and the NKVD commandant a certificate issued by his work place in Lwow which stated that he was an engineer and proceeded to outline to them his plan for draining the bogs. Since my uncle spoke fluent Russian, he had no difficulty convincing our "masters" about the merits of his

otherwise harebrained idea. He was permitted to organize a team consisting of several people. Of course, all of the men with whom we traveled in the same freight car from Lwow including Polana formed the core of the team. There were also a few "strangers" among whom the most prominent was an older gentleman with a goatie, Mr. S., whose assignment on the team was to carry around drinking water, so-called *kipyatok*, to the thirsty diggers. The same day my uncle, Polana and two other men marked off the outlines of the future main ditch.

Ditch Digging

Next morning, after having picked up our tools from the tool shed, we started digging along the entire length of the future ditch; *i.e.* approximately 150 yards. We had to stand barefoot and ankle deep in mud. At noon the manager and the NKVD commandant showed up at the work site, praised our work and announced that we would be paid by the cubic yards of earth dug out and for each cleared tree stump. After a few days we came to realize how meager our pay was but nothing could be done about it because it was the nation-wide pay scale. One nearly had to kill oneself in order to earn a living for one person.

Every day the NKVD commandant and the militiamen visited our work site to watch us dig, to offer advice how to remove the stump of some giant tree and, generally, to laugh at the capitalists and Polish *pany* (gentry) standing up to their knees in mud. And so we labored for two weeks under the unbearably hot summer sun constantly surrounded by swarms of mosquitoes. Sometimes a mild wind blew and we built bonfires so that the smoke kept the insects away but we could not work in the smoke either. When the main ditch was finished, the manager announced that we would not dig any more because his superiors had cut off the funds. However, much more important reasons were at the root of this decision. Our team was nicknamed *Brygada Uch co robi za dwóch* because of our work efficiency and speed. The English meaning of the nickname implied that we were a bunch of goof-offs. Furthermore, there was a number of educated people on the team who contributed to the *esprit de corps* and that really irked the authorities. For the Soviets the intelligentsia among Polish displaced persons was the greatest obstacle to the acclimatization of those people to the Soviet way of life. The Soviets abhor any spontaneity, especially in group action. If one had a project, a proposal, or a petition, one presented it alone and never as part of a delegation! Whenever a delegation came to a superior or any person with authority, the first question was: "Who told you to come together?"

Next morning equipped with saws, axes and other similar implements, and carrying a few pieces of bread spread with jam or butter, leftovers from our Lwow provisions, we went into the forest. There we were divided into teams of six people, including one or two women in each team whose job was to collect the hacked off tree branches and put them into piles. When our team arrived at the assigned place, we put up a sign warning any passersby about falling trees. Then the forest master gave a brief talk about the intricacies of lumbering and we started working. Needless to say, we worked very slowly and tired out rapidly and easily. Our hands hurt from the axes and became callused. Our backs and arms hurt from sawing. More and more frequently we had to sit down on fallen timbers for a smoke. The forest master, Ivan Ivanovich Ivanov, joined us and we offered him cigarettes from Lwow which were a rarity in this part of the country. He was a very pleasant and good fellow, a member of one of the minorities in the Soviet Union. Ivanov asked us about Poland which he had seen while serving in the Russian army during the war of 1914-1918 and told us the history of the region.

Our settlement was located in the European part of Russia between the cities of Kazan and Nizhniy Novgorod in the virgin forests which extended east to the Ural Mountains and north to the Arctic Circle. It was 50 kilometers (30 miles) distant from the capital of the republic and 30 kilometers (20 miles) from a large industrial settlement, Rechnaya, which had several sawmills and a narrow-gauge railroad depot. Rechnaya was located on the banks of a small river which joined the Volga River about 3 kilometers (2 miles) downstream. In the spring and summer the timber was brought from the forest to Rechnaya, floated down the small river to the Volga and then down the Volga to the Caspian Sea. On the opposite side of the Volga River was the district town. Within a 6-11 kilometer (3½ - 7 mile) radius from our settlement there were two other settlements, several around Rechnaya and some more in the forest. Before our arrival our settlement was inhabited by exiled Russians who had been sentenced for various criminal activities, and by former *kulaki*; *i.e.* the well-to-do peasants deprived of their land, livestock and homes by collectivization. The industrial manager, the forest masters, the stable foreman, the blacksmith and his assistant and all of our overseers were at one time or another sentenced to internal exile and had no hope of leaving the forest even after their terms were up.

And so working, smoking and chatting we passed our first workday in the forest. We fell, cleaned off the branches and sawed into logs about ten trees, a rather small number. The daily norm was 6-7 cubic meters (yards) per person; *i.e.* the equivalent of forty cubic meters (yards) for our team. An average tree in the forest was about 0.75 cubic meters (yards). Consequently, we should have lumbered 50-65

trees or four times as many as we did. The pay was 80-85 *kopeks* (100 *kopeks* = 1 *ruble*) for one cubic meter (yard). In other words, during our first workday as lumberjacks we earned 1-1.5 *rubles* per person or just enough for two kilograms (about 4.5 lb.) of the sour, moist black bread which cost 75 *kopeks* per kilogram. We returned to our barracks dead tired and immediately hit the sack.

Next day we earned a few more *kopeks* but felt totally drained. Thus we worked for several days at this hard labor under the burning sun, bitten by swarms of mosquitoes and horseflies. Our earnings did not exceed three *rubles* per day no matter how hard we tried. We were totally exhausted. The mess hall, where one could eat three meals a day for very little money, served the same kind of slop we had eaten in the mess hall on the river landing. Our situation became tragic. Many of us suffered gastro-intestinal tract disorders and had ulcers all over our bodies from scratching the insect bites. People started grumbling and when the manager announced that lumberjack teams formed from the "ex-ditch diggers" would start working as carters the next morning, a mutiny broke out because they did not want to go to work in the forest.

Returning from the forest that evening, we gathered in front of the administration barracks. Armed with axes we must have looked pretty threatening, because the three militiamen locked themselves up in the commandant's office and the forest masters in their barracks. The manager and the NKVD commandant happened to be away. The rally started and the first person to speak was Sam, the youngest of the Mayer brothers. Having been a member of the illegal Polish Communist Party before the war of 1939, Sam spoke with the fervor and experience of a true illegal rally speaker. Rather short in stature and surrounded by taller men so that he could not be spotted by any possible informers, Sam demanded better living and working conditions. The crowd repeated each demand loudly. Suddenly we noticed that the deputy manager, forest master Grishin, led a saddled horse out of the stable. The crowd ran in his direction but he managed to jump on the horse and to gallop away in the direction of Rechnaya. Stones and lumps of dirt were thrown after him and our laughter and whistles followed him. The crowd dispersed but it was obvious to everyone that Grishin went to get the manager and the NKVD commandant. The situation was uncertain.

That evening Sam and Polana came to our room. Both of them admired my uncle and considered him to be their confidant and friend. Sam decided to escape from the camp and return to Lwow that night. He was a student at the Lwow Technical University and had not been resettled but had arrived at the railroad station voluntarily to be with his family and to share their fate. After several weeks in the camp Sam realized that he could be of more help to his family by staying free and in Lwow from where he could send them food packages, rather than by staying with them in the camp where he would be a burden to them. And there was another reason for his decision to escape; namely, his speech at the rally. We came to realize that there were some people in the camp who informed on others to the NKVD commandant in exchange for better jobs or other favors; typical confidants and provocateurs, products of tragic circumstances and weak character. At this time they were not yet even coerced by the NKVD personnel. Later coercion became quite frequent.

It was Polana who enlightened us about those intricacies of life in a totalitarian society. He managed to endear himself to the NKVD commandant, helped the militiamen chop wood, played dominoes with them, and was given a pair of pants, a Russian blouse (*gimnastyorka*) and a pair of boots. In the commandant's office he was "their man." People believed that he was a confidant of the authorities. My uncle and I knew that this was not the case and Polana continued to be a welcome visitor in our room. That truly shocked the rest of our people. And so it was decided that evening that Sam Mayer would escape in the night. My aunt gave him the address of her cousins in Gorky and the address of our landlady in Lwow. The next morning Polana showed up with the "report" that Sam had escaped from the settlement late the previous evening and that the NKVD commandant had returned late at night having been informed by Grishin about the rally and the mutiny. We dressed, ate some watery soup in which one grain of groats chased another one and went to the stable.

Carters

The stable was located by the stream on the edge of the settlement. It housed approximately 80 horses. Next to the stable there was the smithy, the harness shop, the joiner's shop, a warehouse to store harnesses and a barn for storing hay during the winter. In front of the stable, in neatly arranged rows, were parked carts for hauling logs. When all of the "ex-ditch diggers" gathered at the stable, the NKVD commandant ordered us to form a row, climbed on one of the carts and delivered a speech pertaining to our behavior the previous day. The gist of his talk was that nobody gave us permission to call a rally or organize a mutiny. We were prisoners and any activity outside that permitted by camp regulations would be punishable. As far as the rally was concerned, there would be an investigation and those guilty of organizing it would be tried by a court and sent to prison in the district town. When the commandant finished his "educating remarks" and climbed down from the cart, the stable foreman, Rykov, took his place and delivered the following speech: "Carters belong to the aristocracy of the workers in the lumber industry. Your pay, as well as your work conditions, will be better than those of the lumberjacks. Each one of you will be responsible for your horse, your cart and for your horse's harness. It is **ABSOLUTELY** forbidden to hit a horse and if the animal gets sick, it is the teamster who bears the full responsibility for the animal's condition. He will be imprisoned for five years. You better remember that a horse costs 5000 *rubles*, whereas the life of each one of you is not worth 5 kopeks." At this moment I did a quick calculation in my head and arrived at a ratio of 1:100,000 in favor of the horse! Foreman Rykov continued: "You will show up at the stable at 6:45 in the morning, water the horse, hitch it to the cart and ride into the forest with the rest of your team. Under no circumstances should the horse run to or from work. If you report for work five minutes late, 25% of your pay will be deducted for three months for the first offense. It will become a 25% pay deduction for six months for the second offense and a 1-3 year prison term for the third offense."

When Rykov finished his "cheerful" talk, we were shown how to hitch the horses to the carts we would use. Even those of us who were familiar with hitching horses in Poland found the Russian way of hitching horses unfamiliar because the Russian harness included a wooden bow (*duga*) and because of it differed from any other harness. There were three types of carts for hauling logs. The usual four-wheel carts were used for hauling two-meter (two-yard) logs. The two-wheeled front parts of those carts were used for hauling longer logs by placing the thicker end of the log on the axle and tying it with a chain while the thinner end of it dragged on the ground. This method of hauling was used for distances of up to 1 kilometer (about 0.6 miles). For longer distances, another two-wheel cart was placed under the thinner end of the log with its shafts tied together and to the log thus forming a long four-wheel cart.

After familiarizing us with the "tools of trade" of a carter, Rykov led each of us individually into the stable and after a few minutes the carter emerged leading the assigned horse which he attempted to hitch to an assigned cart. The act of hitching the animals provoked gales of laughter from the Russians observing the scene. The NKVD commandant sneered at my uncle: "What kind of engineer are you, if you don't even know how to hitch a horse? In the Soviet Union every engineer knows how to do it!"

Finally my turn came and I followed the stable foreman into the stable. It was a rather dark building with individual stalls for each horse. The horses were tied to troughs located along the walls of the stable with their rumps toward the passageway which ran through the middle of the stable from door to door. We stopped in front of a stall with a big white horse. "Get in, untie the animal and hitch him to a wagon." growled the stable foreman. I just stood there petrified. At this point I must admit that I have always been afraid of horses. In Warsaw when I had to cross the street at a hackney coach stand I never did it in the middle of the line but always in the beginning or at the end of it, unless the distance between the back of the coach and the head of the next coach's horse was at least two meters (two yards). And here I faced a horse with his rump toward me ("What if he kicks me?" went through my mind.). There was barely sufficient space between the horse and the partition of the stall to squeeze through. I thought I caught a glimpse of mischief in the horse's eye. Obviously he was scheming about how to harm me. "Hurry up and get in! What are you waiting for?" yelled the stable foreman. There was no way out. I offered my soul to the Lord, closed my eyes and, faster than one can say "Jack Robinson," ran into the stall. I hit the trough with my stomach and opened my eyes. The horse just stood there chewing oats. I thought he looked both surprised and contemptuous. I felt ashamed, blushed, untied the bridle and led out my future co-worker. His name was Mars and he was a strong and pretty horse. I hitched him quickly and with no difficulty to a

"two-wheeler." Obviously, I had mastered the art of being a carter rather rapidly! Next I found a short piece of board which I placed on the two shafts in front of the axle. Together with the axle it formed a platform one foot wide. I stood on it holding on to the reins for dear life. One after another we moved out of the yard and in the direction of the forest. Our cavalcade must have looked like a parade of Roman chariots. (The only difference was that there was a greater chance of falling off of our two-wheelers than from Roman chariots.) As soon as we left the yard in front of the stable, the horses began to gallop. It was difficult to keep one's balance even standing with bent knees on the unmercifully bumpy two-wheelers. After a half-hour trip we arrived in the forest at our place of work.

The Work

In the forest we were divided into teams consisting of 4-6 workers. A Russian lumberjack was assigned to each team as an instructor. The work was not difficult and did not require any extensive physical effort. The most important part of the work was the "know how," i.e. the knowledge of various tricks needed to load the fallen logs onto the two-wheelers with the least amount of effort. Our instructor used different tricks depending upon the positions of the logs and the loading took approximately 2-5 minutes. Then the logs were dragged to the railroad siding where unloading the two-wheeler took about 30 seconds. In a few days we mastered the loading, dragging and unloading of the logs. It was not the work that exasperated us most, but our horses. It seemed that they were not as obedient in our hands as in the hands of the Russians. We yelled at them and cursed them loudly using the "juiciest" Polish curses. Every evening we returned from work hoarse or totally voiceless, but the horses were not any more obedient. Finally it occurred to us that the horses were used to Russian curses which we abhorred because they were so crude. There was no way out of this dilemma and in due course we learned to curse in Russian even though many of us cringed at the mere thought of doing it. And so the work went on at its normal pace. From time to time our superiors "comforted" us by saying: "You will get used to it and if not, you will die." again using the word reserved for dying animals. "You will die yourself," we used to answer in helpless fury.

After several days I had a heated exchange of words with a forest master. He did not like something I did and called my attention to it insulting my mother and calling her names. I did not know at the time that the Russians use such expressions even in a friendly conversation, so I became rabid, told him that probably his mother was "that kind of a woman" and called him an s.o.b. The Russian became obviously dumfounded and said: "Why do you insult me? I did not insult you, I just wanted to teach you." I was still hot under the collar and said: "What do you mean? You yourself used insults while referring to my mother and you are not even good enough to polish her shoes." Only then did the forest master realize what had happened and consoled me by saying that they use those expressions even in everyday language. I told him: "Among yourselves you can talk any way you want to but when you talk to me don't you ever dare use those kinds of expressions!" He just shook his head. "You will get used to it." he said and went into the forest. Another time my uncle had an altercation with one of the Russians who addressed him by the more intimate "you" (second person singular) than by the more formal "you" (second person plural). In the Russian language these two forms of addressing a person are analogous to *du* and *sie* in German. My uncle told him that, after all, "they did not watch a some pigs in a pasture together and, consequently, the Russian had no right to address him in this manner." Ivan seemed befuddled and said: "Listen, we are teammates, aren't we? How can I address you using the more formal 'you'?" He was right. Now we were teammates.

And so gradually we became drawn into our work. Our earnings started to increase. We also began to grasp the intricacies of the Soviet bureaucratic system. The system that existed in our labor camp could well serve as an illustration. Everything was based on the **PLAN**, one of the most mysterious and magic words in the Soviet Union. **PLAN** periods could vary from one day to five years (the famous *pyatiletki* or five-year plans). Our camp, being a part of some whole, was given a one-year plan in each of its industrial activities; i.e. tree-cutting, transporting the logs to the railroad siding and loading them on flatcars. In turn this plan was divided into quarterly, monthly, weekly and daily plans. Of course, the plan assumed that each team fulfilled its norm, thus only the number of one or another kind of teams was regulated depending upon the needs of a particular industrial activity. In case a particular plan was not fulfilled, the industrial manager and his deputy bore the full responsibility. They would first have to answer to the local party authorities. These people could forward the case to the public prosecutor and that meant arrest, trial and imprisonment. The norms for transporting logs were based on the distance and on the quality of the horses. For example, in the wintertime; i.e. from October 1 until April 1 the norms were higher because neither the carters nor their horses had to put up with the unbearable summer heat and also the icy roads were better. While the difference was only 1-2 cubic meters per horse or per lumberjack, if one considered the fact that the work days were shorter (from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.; i.e. seven hours) the difference in the norm was significantly larger. Anyway, after a few days each transporting team was fulfilling between one-half and one norm, and our earnings reached 3-6 *rubles* per day.

In the beginning of September we learned about the Soviet "work incentive" system. A lumberjack

who fulfilled forty norms in a given work season (summer or winter) received about 130 rubles as a bonus. The next 20 norms entitled him to 1½ pay, the subsequent 40 norms to pay and three-quarters. The award for fulfilling over 100 norms was double pay. Consequently, we decided to take our work seriously with the beginning of the winter work season and to "go after the norms." In the meantime, the fall season, which was very unpleasant in these parts, was rapidly approaching. How different it was from the golden Polish autumn! Frequently, working in the forest all day under the penetrating rain, we remembered the golden leaves falling from the trees in the Łazienki Park in Warsaw, in the Planty in Krakow or in the Łyczaków Park in Lwow. We longed for those places thinking that life was better there. In reality life under the Nazi yoke was much worse.

One September morning on the way to work my uncle's two-wheeler hit a small tree stump. My uncle lost his balance, fell into some mud and bruised himself badly. Needless to say, I took him back to the settlement. Both my aunt and I were afraid that the accident would seriously affect his health because he had only one kidney, the other one having been removed before the war. After a few days my uncle received a pass to the city to appear before a medical commission in the hospital. The commission decided that he was a "2nd category" invalid; *i.e.* incapable of doing any physical work but capable of working in an office.

The fall weather took its toll on the people in the settlement. Abscesses from mosquito bites were festering and in addition people started catching colds. Fortunately, nobody in our family had any abscesses but Kathy, my little cousin, caught a cold. In the next settlement, about four miles from ours, there was a small dispensary and the medical assistant, a woman, (*feldsheritsa*) used to visit our camp twice a week. During one of her scheduled visits we asked her to examine Kathy. We were told that there was nothing seriously wrong with her, but she was given some medicine and was to stay in bed for a few days. The medical assistant spent about an hour in our room inquiring about life in Poland and talking about herself. She was Finnish and her husband was Russian. During Stalin's "purges" her husband was tried, sentenced to death and executed. She and a small child were exiled to the settlement where she was in charge of the dispensary. Shortly after their arrival the child died because of the severe climatic conditions in that part of the country. She sympathized with us, consoled us as much as she could and said at the end of her visit in a barely audible whisper: "You do not know it as yet but here in the Soviet Union 25% of the population is in such settlements, concentration camps and prisons." After a while she added as if to leave no doubt in our minds: "45,000,000 people! Understand?!" We gave her six hypodermic needles as a gift. She was extremely grateful and promised to send us various drugs. We parted as close friends.

In the middle of September we had the first joyful day since our departure from Lwow; the arrival of our first mail. Our landlady in Lwow had been given our address by Sam Mayer, who had escaped from the camp after the "mutiny" and the rally. She forwarded all of the correspondence addressed to us which she had collected dutifully for two months. That pretty big packet included letters from my parents in Warsaw, from my maternal aunt in the U.S., from friends and acquaintances in Lwow and from my aunt's sister who lived in Moscow. She had received our address from a cousin in Gorky, who in turn had received it from Sam when the latter visited him on his way to Lwow. The "Moscow sister" wrote that she had talked to all of her relatives who gladly offered to help us but that my aunt should not write to any of them directly from our labor camp. All of the contacts were to be directed through the "Moscow sister." It was understandable because we were a threat to them; firstly as Poles, secondly as foreigners and thirdly as deportees. Obviously even letter contacts could lead to their imprisonment and possible loss of life. We were lepers to the Soviet citizens. Our landlady and those friends and acquaintances who remained in Lwow wrote that in a settlement on the Volga River, approximately 40-50 kilometers (25-30 miles), from our camp were the Bergs, very good and old friends of my aunt and uncle. Some of their other friends were 30 kilometers (20 miles) from Rechnaya. The other people who used to visit us in Lwow traveled 4-6 weeks and found themselves in Siberia, or in the Far North, in the Komi or the Archangelsk Republics. Those who had remained in Lwow promised to send parcels. We were encouraged and knew deep in our hearts that we would not remain in those damned forests forever, that some day we would return to Poland and to freedom. In the meantime we had to survive somehow.

Our work conditions improved. I started earning about 160-180 *rubles* per month. Of course, it was very little but with supplemental help one could survive. Each worker received 800 grams (1.75 pounds)

of bread per day, while non-working dependents were entitled to 400-500 grams (about one pound) daily. This ration was sufficient for our family. Also the quality of the bread was good. When we arrived in the camp, one could get only black bread in the commissary and it was awfully sour. Now the bread looked like pumpernickel and was of good quality. Also from time to time we could buy some cloth, hard candies, fish, etc. Only occasionally was there insufficient bread to go around and at those times we used to receive a two-day ration the following day. One Saturday upon returning home from work I went to get bread but the commissary was closed. There was not enough bread for our team which had remained at work longer. To make things worse, the next day was Sunday and the commissary was also closed so we would have to wait until Monday to get bread. Sundays were devoted to sawing and chopping wood to ensure a week's supply women to do the cooking and heating. There were four carters in our barracks and always the carters were permitted to bring home any defective lumber, which was rejected by the inspecting foreman. In this way we brought wood to the camp during the week and on Sundays all of the men would take turns sawing, chopping and carrying it to a closet in the hall. One Sunday as we were busy preparing wood for the week Peter, one of the Russian loaders, came by. He greeted us, said: "God help you" and asked everyone present if they had any toilet water to sell. We were surprised by his question and despite our desire to please him were unable to satisfy his request. Nobody seemed to have any toilet water. My aunt had a bottle of *Coty* perfume, another lady had a small bottle of *Soir de Paris* Soir but they kept the perfume for their own use and did not want to sell it. Puzzled by Peter's request we found an unexpected answer a few minutes later. He went to the next barracks, left it after a while and, as he passed us, the smell of some cheap toilet water followed him. We stopped working and one of us remarked ironically: "He surely must have doused himself with that stinking toilet water." No sooner did we go back to sawing when the neighbor from that barracks approached us. He had a strange expression on his face, a mixture of bewilderment and amusement, and told us the following story. Peter came to them offering to buy toilet water. The neighbor's wife happened to have a 8 ounce bottle of some cheap toilet water and sold it to him. Peter was most grateful, uncorked the bottle, drank its contents on the spot, again thanked the woman profusely and left. We had a subject of conversation for the remainder of that day.

Next day I reported to the manager and told him that I would not go to work because I had not received bread for the past two days and had no food to take with me to work. The manager immediately sent a messenger to the commissary and to the bakery. The bread was still in the oven. I told the manager that I would not ride into the forest until I got bread. In the meantime I returned to my barracks and waited until the bread was ready. Two hours later I reported to the manager. "The bread is ready," he said, "You can go and pick it up. Yakovlev (the salesman in the commissary) will give it to you in the bakery. After you pick up the bread, get ready for a trip. You will ride with the medical assistant to the district town to pick up some medicines for the dispensary." Needless to say, I was very happy with the way things turned out. At least for a few days I would get out of that cursed forest and into a town. I returned to our barracks with the bread, put a loaf in it and a small jar with some rendered butter into my knapsack, took some money and went to the stable. I hitched my Mars to a boxlike cart which I filled with hay. I was also given a small sack with oats. Thus prepared for the trip I pulled up in front of the administration office. The manager and the NKVD commandant came out on the stairs and handed me a certificate stating that I was a laborer in that camp. Then the manager said: "I phoned the medical assistant and told her you would come to pick her up. Don't tire out the horse and watch for cars and trucks." The commandant added: "Don't even attempt to escape. We will catch you anyway and send you to prison." The farewell was truly most pleasant! I jerked the reins and moved down the road that the stable master showed me.

After half an hour I arrived at the dispensary. The medical assistant recognized me immediately, asked about Kathy's health and about my aunt and my uncle. We loaded a box for the medicines into the cart and were on our way. The road went through the forest and my passenger, who frequently went to the town, acted as the navigator. All through the trip we talked about life "out there in your country." After several hours we passed Rechnaya and before sundown arrived on the bank of the Volga. The town was on the other side of the river which we had to cross by ferry. The ferry was a giant barge pulled by a small motorboat. I jumped off the cart, held my horse by his bridle and led him onto the ferry. There were already about twelve wagons of assorted sizes and a crowd of people on the ferry. As soon as the ferry found itself in the middle of the river, the horses became restless. They started snorting, and attempted to rear up on their hind legs. The noise made by the horses and the cursing of people was deafening. My

Mars insisted on pushing me against the railing and tossed his head so violently that I thought he would pull my wrist out of its joint. After what seemed to me to be an eternity we pulled up to the dock. I led Mars out still holding him by his bridle. He pricked up his ears and ran from the ferry as if he had seen the devil himself. Fortunately, the road up the hill was quite steep so he rapidly became tired and stopped. That gave me an opportunity to jump back into the cart. I was huffing and puffing, being no less tired than Mars. The only difference was that he got tired from pulling the cart and I got tired from running alongside of him. On the way from the dock to the house where we were to spend the night we encountered only one truck and not a moving one to boot. It had a flat tire and the driver was busy repairing the inner tube. Nevertheless Mars looked sideways, snorted and pricked up his ears. I jerked the reins and drew his attention away from the immobile truck.

Finally we arrived at the house where we were to spend the night. It belonged to some acquaintances of the medical assistant. I put the cart in the garden, unhitched Mars and tied him to the cart. Without any delay he started to munch the hay. In the meantime I transferred our luggage and the harness to the house. Our hosts, an old couple with a daughter, son-in-law and a grandchild, were obviously delighted to see us and immediately put up the *samovar*. They were particularly interested in me. The medical assistant was full of praise when she told them about our little family. They just shook their heads, commiserated with us, reminisced about the old pre-Revolutionary times when there was plenty of everything and asked about life "out there in your country." The table was set for supper: a few teacups, a few pieces of black bread on a plate and some hard candies on a saucer. "Now we drink tea with hard candies," apologized the old man. "We have not had sugar for some time. We can rarely even get hard candy. This week my old lady stayed in line at the store for several hours and got 400 grams" (almost 1 pound). I placed my bread and butter on the table. The pumpnickel amazed my hosts because only black bread was available in their store. We sat down to supper. Our hostess placed the samovar on the table and served millet- grits with milk. Millet grits was (and probably still is) the most widespread and the most available food in the Soviet Union. We ate and talked about our previous life styles. I described to them life in Poland and they reminisced about life in czarist Russia and about the period of NEP (New Economic Policy); *i.e.* until the death of Lenin in 1924. After supper I watered the horse, gave him his oats and without taking off my clothes stretched out on a bench in the room. I could not fall asleep for a long time because I was thinking about the day's experiences. One impression was particularly bothersome to me. Both the old and the young reminisced about old times. When asked about achievements of the Soviet system as extolled by the Lwow newspapers both responded scornfully: "Don't believe the newspapers. They only print lies. One can write anything and 'the paper will stand it (*bumaga vydierzhit*)!'"

Next morning I got up early, watered and fed Mars, and had breakfast which consisted of bread with butter and tea brewed from dried raspberries. In Russia where tea used to be almost a national beverage, real tea was now a rarity and people brewed all kinds of substitutes. The medical assistant went to the hospital, and I decided to take a walk through the town. It was a typical Soviet district town but still showed some traces of its "previous grandeur." Before the revolution it was a rich mercantile town and a river harbor halfway between Kazan and Gorki. The main commerce was lumber. A nice brick church attested to the town's past wealth. Its towers, their sheet metal roofs gone a long time ago, could be seen for several kilometers. Now the ruined church served as a fire house, with wagons, ladders and fire hoses parked inside it. I took a walk down the main street. It followed the bank of the Volga River and was appropriately named River Road. Along it was a hotel, the district store and a restaurant. The hotel, a two-story building, was quite decrepit. Its second-story balcony overlooked "the park", a big lawn crisscrossed by paths with a statue of Lenin prominently located in the center of it. I also went to the store. There was hardly any merchandise on the shelves. In the showcase were a few cheap costume jewelry pins. I bought two tubes of yellow vaseline and two envelopes of tooth powder. The saleswoman did not want to sell me any more of these two items. "No more than two per citizen permitted," she announced authoritatively. The restaurant was closed so I could not go in. According to a notice posted on the door, it was open three times a day for one hour at each mealtime. I decided to go to the market place, the center of every Russian town regardless of the town's size, geographic location or type of population. Walking down the dirty, littered, unpaved streets, I did not come across a single store front except for a sheet metal shop which accepted orders for buckets and other sheet metal utensils from material supplied by the customer. Buckets or teakettles which required soldering were not accepted for repair because the shop had neither solder nor flux.

Finally, I arrived at the market place, a large square with a few stalls. Peasant men and women were selling their merchandise. One could buy milk, buttermilk, meat, butter, white rolls, flour, groats, honey, needles, thread, dyes for cloth, pencils and pens. Everything was in very small quantities and the total value of all the merchandise offered for sale did not exceed ten dollars in today's value terms. There were also large quantities of sunflower seeds and *makhorka*, home grown tobacco dried and chopped into small pieces, and sold by the glassful. One would put some of the *makhorka* on a 2x3 inch piece of newspaper, rolled it into a "joint," lick the edge of the paper to make it stick, pinch both ends of the cigarette so that the *makhorka* would not fall out and smoked it. I bought two pounds of beef for eleven rubles and returned to the restaurant. It was open by then. A set dinner menu listed cucumber soup, meat, vinaigrette salad and 200 grams (almost ½ pound of bread). The soup was both sour and salty with a few pieces of cucumber in it. Fifty grams (almost two ounces) of boiled meat was accompanied by a tablespoonful of porridge with some sunflower oil. I took one look at the vinaigrette salad: pieces of beet root, pickles, potatoes and onion doused with sunflower oil, and decided against even tasting it. The dinner cost 1½ rubles. I returned to the house, watered my Mars and gave him some oats. The medical assistant returned shortly. I hitched the horse to the wagon and said goodbye to our wonderful hosts. "Visit us again sometime. You are always most welcome (*milosti prosim*). It was so nice talking with you." The old couple said with tears in their eyes as they bid us farewell. I jumped onto the wagon and we drove to the pharmacy. I was very disturbed by the fact that we would be returning at night through the forest especially since I did not see well at night on account of being nearsighted. By that time I had also started suffering from night blindness. The medical assistant allayed my fear by saying that we would start on the main highway toward the capital of the republic and then take a side road toward our settlement. She was very familiar with the road so there was no chance of getting lost. We drove up to the pharmacy, picked up the box with the medicines, and got on the ferry.

At sunset when we reached the highway, Mars was trotting merrily along sensing that we were returning home. Soon it became dark. We rode for several hours on the highway without encountering a single human being, a car or a truck, when my navigator told me to turn into a side road. Shortly after we found ourselves in the forest. In the darkness it was impossible to steer the horse in order to miss tree stumps. I let go of the reins knowing full well that Mars would instinctively find the way. I wrapped my jacket around me because the nights and mornings had started to be quite chilly. I could not even snooze worrying about the possibility of encountering wolves. The horse stepped carefully, the medical assistant slept sitting up. It was already daylight when we arrived at the dispensary. After another hour I was unhitching Mars at our stable. The manager happened to be around and asked: "How was it? Is the horse OK?" "Yes." I answered with a big yawn that almost swallowed the manager. "You can go to sleep now and go back to work tomorrow morning." he said magnanimously.

Back in the barracks, I undressed and went to sleep. I got up late in the afternoon. While eating dinner, I told my aunt about the trip. I also noticed that my uncle was not around. It turned out that on the day of my departure the position of junior accountant became vacant in the office and the administration had decided to have a timekeeper rather than a junior accountant. The NKVD commandant recommended my uncle to the manager as a person suitable for that position. Since my uncle knew Russian fluently and could only do office work because of his invalid status, he was assigned both jobs; i.e. that of the timekeeper and the junior accountant. His take-home pay was approximately 200 rubles per month which was a big help in our situation. There were also additional advantages; e.g. when the commissary received some special merchandise like hard candies or cloth, the office workers did not have to wait in line to buy them. My uncle was also in a position to watch that the workers' pay was honestly calculated. Consequently, everybody's earnings increased because the chief accountant, a Russian, had cheated unmercifully. As I have already mentioned, my uncle had a gift for "making friends and influencing people," so after only a few days the workers, as well as the administration became enthusiastic about the new junior accountant. The Russian accountant, the manager, the NKVD commandant and the remaining militiamen (our guard detail was reduced from four militiamen to two) constantly admired my uncle's ability to count in his head and to print letters using the so-called technical script rather than writing in longhand. The only other displaced person working in the office, the deputy chief accountant, was also happy because he had someone with whom he could speak Polish. Conversing in Russian made him break out in a cold sweat. He was from Krakow and thus totally unfamiliar with the Russian language, because that part of Poland became a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the last partition of the country at the end of the 18th century and remained as such until the

end of the First World War. Whereas my uncle was part of a generation, which grew up in that part of Poland that was under Russian occupation until 1916 and, consequently, had graduated from Russian schools.

By this time our situation in the camp became stabilized. The office staff consisted of two deportees and the chief accountant, a big obese Russian weighing undoubtedly over 250 pounds, who looked like Oliver Hardy of the famous movie comedian team of Laurel and Hardy. His name was Stepan Pavlovich. In the forest, those who inspected the lumber, as well as their assistants were all exiles. They were young men who did not do any physical labor because their parents were able to bribe the manager and the forest masters to secure soft jobs for their offspring. Bribery was a way of life in the Soviet Union and undoubtedly remained as such in present day Russia. It was not at all difficult to bribe someone if one had the means to do it.

The First Winter

By now the winter was rapidly approaching. The snow started suddenly. One day the snow was so thick that the visibility was zero and the wind was so strong that it broke the small trees and saplings which were left in the forest to grow into new trees after lumbering. The forest masters and workers panicked. The forest masters worried that falling trees may kill some of the horses. Never mind the people! HORSES! However, none of them dared to order us to go home. Finally, after a long time which seemed like eternity, the deputy manager arrived on horseback and ordered us to go back to the settlement. Blinded by the thick swirling snow we ran from under the falling trees. Fortunately there were no casualties either in men or in horses except for three broken two-wheelers whose drivers and horses survived by some miracle.

The exiles resigned themselves to their fate. Single men gave up their plans to escape from the camp and return to Lwow. Although a few people succeeded, one individual perished in the forest. We were issued winter clothing and footwear. The clothing consisted of a padded jacket (*fufayka*) and padded trousers similar to present day down jackets but thinner and filled with cotton instead of down. It cost 79 rubles. The winter footwear was *valenki*, high felt boots which cost about 50 rubles. The cost of our winter clothing and footwear was deducted from our pay over a three-month period. Warm caps and gloves were not provided, and we had to secure them ourselves. Because the commissary could not get a winter cap in my size, I had no other choice but to work all winter in a summer cap with a visor and to wear earmuffs.

While there was already snow in the forest, the road to the forest was deep mud; so one morning we took sleds to the forest and left them there. That forced us to ride to and from work on horseback. In the beginning it caused numerous problems including sore behinds, because we were not used to horseback riding, especially bareback. Eventually we got used to that too. With the appearance of snow our horses had all kinds of surprises in store for us. For example, we did not know that they liked to wallow in the snow. One day Mars refused to pull the load and stretched out on the ground. I thought something dreadful had happened to him and already pictured myself behind prison bars. Immediately I called the nearest forest master. He just laughed, told me to unhitch the horse and then kicked him in the stomach. When Mars got up the Russian said: "He is only pretending (*duraka valayet*)."

Working with sleds in the winter was more difficult than with two-wheelers during the rest of the year. It took several people to lift a log onto a sled even with the help of short wooden poles. The sled consisted of two runners joined by a transverse piece of wood hollowed out in the middle so that the log would not move sideways when fastened with a chain. The shafts were attached to the runners by means of a thin rope made out of linden bast. Of course, the rope broke frequently, but especially when the sled was loaded and the horse jerked suddenly. Changing the rope in the freezing and snowy weather with one's bare hands was a sheer torture. We tried to wear our felt boots but the snow was still too wet and they immediately soaked through. It was too cold to wear ordinary shoes. Furthermore, my shoes were practically in shreds. I decided to follow the advice of some of the Russians and wrapped my feet in rags made from old sacks and wear bast sandals. The NKVD commandant was really pleased. "Now you are just like the Russian people," he used to say with a grin.

The twenty-third anniversary of the October Revolution was rapidly approaching. The commandant organized several women into a team which cleaned and whitewashed the club barracks. A red banner was hung above the stage. It proclaimed in large white letters "Long Live the 23rd Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution!" The walls were decorated with portraits of Lenin, Stalin, Budienny and Voroshilov. On the eve of the holiday a meeting took place in the club. Attendance was mandatory. The new industrial manager delivered a speech (the old manager had been transferred to another camp). The same old pabulum with sentences straight out of pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestiya* and chapters of the "History of the Great Communist Party of the Bolsheviks." The new manager made a very bad impression on all of us. He was big and obese, had a red face and was rude in his dealings with people. Within several months he became so "popular" in the district and among the exiles that he was expelled from the party, removed from his job and almost imprisoned. After the manager's speech Yakovlev, the salesman in our commissary, brought a victrola and we danced a little to the tunes of some old waltzes and polkas from worn out records. We bought some candies and cookies at the counter and went home to sleep. Of

course, only those people who were able to shove others aside managed to buy the "treats" since there was not enough for everybody. We were not eager to fight our way to the counter, because before the holiday candies, peas, cigarettes and vodka had become available in the commissary. It did not take us long to discover that during our stay in the Soviet Union such "luxuries" usually became available before important holidays.

The anniversary of the Great October Revolution was celebrated for two days: November 7 and 8 according to the Gregorian calendar. We spent our free time resting in the barracks and visiting acquaintances. By that time we had become very friendly with Joe, the dentist and his family, the Mayers, and the family of engineer Berger from Krakow, consisting of himself, his wife, their two children and the wife's parents. The Bergers were extremely nice and cultured people. They occupied a part of a barracks on Red Hill where, according to the NKVD commandant, "the bourgeoisie and capitalists, the enemies of the working class and of the Soviet State were entrenched." It was purely coincidental that those people who were in a financially better situation than others happened to live there. The commandant's expression mirrored his attitude toward them. No wonder he vexed them mercilessly. Their living conditions were worse than those of other exiles. They lived in a large barracks which was not partitioned into individual rooms. If they wanted to make any structural changes or additions in their barracks, they had to pay for all of the materials and labor out of their own pockets. The industrial manager felt no obligation to do anything for them because they did not work in the forest. They could afford extra expenses because they had clothes and money, they received giant parcels shipped by freight and were able to bribe the medical examining commission in the district hospital which granted them invalid status. Engineer Berger and Joe, the dentist, used to come to our room every evening to read the newspaper that my uncle brought from the office, and to engage in political discussions. Neither worked in the forest anymore. Engineer Berger had ruptured himself working as a carter with a four-wheel cart for two-meter logs and the medical commission granted him an invalid status. Joe pretended that he had somehow injured his leg and limped for the past two months. The commandant sent him to be examined by the medical commission in the district hospital. He brought back some drugs from the hospital's pharmacy. In the meantime Sam, his brother-in-law, sent him dental instruments and indispensable medicines from Lwow, so Joe opened a dental office in our settlement. We also had a physician, because a physician from Krakow, who had arrived in our transport, received a license to practice medicine.

In order to get some information from reading a Soviet newspaper one had to read between the lines and guess the rest. We had acquired both skills while still in Lwow. A Soviet newspaper differed completely from any other newspaper in the world. There were three types of newspapers: central or Moscow (e.g. *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*), regional, and district newspapers. A regional paper reported local news; e.g. how much grain was delivered by the collective farm A or B, what acreage was plowed, which collective farms were productive and which were not, how well the students were doing scholastically in the various schools, etc. The regional paper contained basically similar news but on a larger scale; i.e. encompassing the whole region. About one-quarter of the last page was devoted to world news. *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* reported national industrial and agricultural news on three pages while the fourth page was devoted to news from abroad. No Soviet newspaper had any news about everyday life: no accidents, no disasters, no burglaries, no thievery, and no muggings, which made the Soviet Union appear to be a true paradise on earth! When in the summer of 1941 a river boat sank on the Volga and 300 people drowned, not a single newspaper mentioned the accident. We learned about it because it happened not too far from our camp. A westerner reading a Soviet newspaper would be under the impression that the Soviet Union was a lucky country with no accidents, disasters or abuses of any kind. Actually, there was so much of it that even a newspaper the size of the Sunday edition of The New York Times would be too small to cover it all. Another problem was simply just getting hold of a newspaper. Circulation was very small. One could not buy a paper at a newsstand and, except for a small number of individuals in large cities like Moscow, could not get a subscription, although the subscription system was very well developed. The central newspapers were allocated to party organizations in factories, county offices or other public institutions. The regional newspapers were allocated to party members, public institutions, clubs, libraries, etc. and to a minimal number of private citizens. Subscriptions to regional newspapers were easier to secure, but nevertheless one had to have the right "pull." Also the importance of a newspaper in the Soviet Union is much greater than in the United States. In the United States the newspaper's function ends when the reader finishes it. During the times described in these reminiscences, a newspaper's function in the Soviet Union only began after the reader finished it, because then it could be used for rolling cigarettes. The

Russians considered a newspaper only with that use in mind. Any time that I would say during a conversation: "The newspaper says..." I was interrupted with "Don't believe what newspapers say. They lie. 'Paper will stand it' (*bumaga vyder'zhit*)."

From our evening discussions and scant news from abroad published in our regional newspaper, we realized that the war was just beginning and there was no hope for its rapid end. There was no news about Poland or about the Polish Government in Exile formed by Gen. Sikorski. We began to doubt that the world knew or cared about the outrage and the injustice done by the Soviet Union to approximately 1,500,000 Polish citizens.

After the October holidays, our work in the forest started at full tilt. Undoubtedly, one reason for this heightened activity was the weather. It got extremely cold, and one way to keep warm was to work intensively. I was promoted to a team leader and had five people on my team including myself. Mars, who was worn out and needed a rest, was replaced by Raven, a handsome black stallion. Raven drove me out of my mind with his laziness. Even beating him with a wooden stick (when nobody looked!) didn't do any good. Furthermore, this horse had the habit of kicking with his hind legs. He also used to jerk the sled suddenly. This invariably broke the bast ropes with which the shafts were tied to the runners. In the beginning I was not aware of Raven's disposition. Once he even kicked me in the stomach, fortunately not too hard. Needless to say, I was hardly enthusiastic about my new "co-worker." Among my teammates was a weaver from Lodz, who spoke rather poor Polish and in an amusing way because he simply did not decline nouns. Every noun in his sentences was in the nominative case no matter whether it was the subject or the object. While it does not make any difference in English, it is ungrammatical in Polish. The five of us worked very well as a team and from the very beginning approached our work with a serious attitude. It had to be done and we decided to make the best of it in order to earn as much as possible. The situation of our family improved because we received several parcels and some money from my aunt's sister in Moscow.

In the beginning of December a large group of workers, exiles like ourselves, was brought to our camp from one of the settlements on the Volga River. It was the same settlement where our friends, the Bergs, from whom we were separated when boarding the river boat, lived. Since that settlement was on the bank of the river, the job of the exiles incarcerated there was to build rafts out of the logs transported from the forest and to float them down the Volga. Of course, in the winter when the river was frozen (it could not be open to traffic until the very end of April), there was no work in that camp and workers were sent to the camps in the forest to help out. Two "loaders" were assigned to my team. Their job was to load the logs on the sleds and in this way increase the team's productivity because the regular team members did not have to spend time loading the sleds. The new members of my team were young identical twins, both redheads, freckled and in identical clothes. The first day they arrived at work I thought I was suffering from double vision due to some nutritional deficiency or that there was something wrong with my glasses. They turned out to be easygoing chaps and good workers. All day long they sang prewar tangos and fox trots off key, and distorted the words in a most amusing way so that I could barely keep a straight face. In the evening in our barracks I used to describe their antics and imitate their singing. Lou, the lawyer who lived in the next room and was also a team leader, begged me to exchange my two "loaders" for his but I did not want to rid myself of the two "nightingales." Not only did they "add spice" to an otherwise dull life, but they were also hard and conscientious workers. Consequently, my team began to exceed the daily work norm by 5-10 percent. That placed it in the "stakhanovite" category which translated into two kilograms (approximately 4 pounds) of bread daily per person instead of 1.5 kilograms. Since our arrival in the camp our bread ration had almost doubled. At this point I should explain that the "stakhanovite movement" was started by A. Stakhanov, a coal miner, who was the first to exceed established daily norms. The movement spread to other areas of industry, to agriculture, to offices, etc.

In December the lumberjacks started working in that part of the forest which could not be cleared during any other season because of deep marshes. It was necessary to lay a railroad siding to that part of the forest. My team was disbanded and its members assigned to delivering railroad ties for the projected track. The work was easy and profitable. The pay was 10 *kopeks* for one tie. It was possible to load 12 ties on the sled and the distance did not exceed 100 meters. This way one could easily earn 12-15 *rubles* daily. It was more than one earned hauling logs but there were no established daily norms, so it did not count toward "accumulating norms." In my case it meant that reaching forty norms and getting a premium was temporarily "on hold."

Building a winter railroad siding was an interesting project in itself. The lumber that would be eventually loaded onto the flatcars was stored all along the projected track. Then the snow along the line was smoothed out with shovels and properly spaced railroad ties were put on top of the snow. Next the rails were placed on the ties and nailed to them thus forming sections of the track. The rails, brought from the main line to the very end of the track being laid down on a small flat car pushed by women and teenagers, were dumped on the snow. My function was to load the ties on my cart, then ride along the projected line and leave a single tie at each one-meter interval. Another group of women and teenagers was assigned the task of arranging the ties in the proper place, carrying the rails by hand and placing them on the ties. A group of men nailed the rails to the ties. In this manner the track moved forward. I was given a different horse, a handsome gray three-year old mare named "Grasshopper." Although she was weaker than my previous horses, she hauled the railroad ties and managed very well. That winter building the railroad siding took all of December. As soon as the track reached the first stores of lumber, flatcars were brought in and the lumber was loaded on them. Of course, the first two attempts at bringing flatcars to the lumber stores failed because the track would dig into the snow under the weight of the stock and several cars, plus the locomotive jumped the track.

Christmas was rapidly approaching. The NKVD commandant permitted us to take off on Christmas Day but we had to work next Sunday to make up for lost time. That Christmas in 1940, the first in exile, was probably one of the saddest holidays I have ever encountered in my whole life. All of the exiles remembered the preholiday excitement in Poland, shopping for gifts, the abundance of goods in the stores, the holiday window displays, trimming the Christmas tree, the cooking and the baking, etc. How different and sad was this most happy of all holidays spent in a lumber labor camp in the Soviet Union. Everyone's thoughts were far away in Poland with families and the loved ones left behind. This mood prevailed not only in our settlement but also in other settlements, in the POW camps, in prisons and concentration camps, and in all of the places in the Soviet Union where Poles were incarcerated. That Christmas Eve in 1940 our thoughts went to Poland which was suffering under the brutal Nazi occupation, then they went west to the POW camps in Germany and farther west to Great Britain where the Government-in-Exile was functioning and the Polish Armed Forces under their Commander-in-Chief, Gen. Sikorski, were regrouping and training after the surrender of France. We expected salvation from the west and we firmly believed that it would come some day. How bitterly disappointing the political events which followed the end of World War II turned out to be for us.

The year 1941 was upon us. A small fir was placed in the club. Again Yakovlev brought his victrola and records. Again the Russians got drunk and hoarse from yelling and drinking, and valiantly attempted to sing some songs. Around Epiphany it got extremely cold. "Christmas Frosts" the Russians told us because it was Christmas time according to the Russian Orthodox calendar. It became progressively more difficult to work in the forest. Despite wearing two pairs of gloves everyone's hands were freezing, and our fingers grew stiff. We made bonfires but it was dangerous to stand too close to them because our padded garments easily smoldered from flying sparks and every day someone returned from work with a hole in the back of the jacket or sleeve, or in a jacket with no back at all; just two sleeves and the front. It was so bitterly cold that in order to warm up one had to stand close to the fire because even two steps away from it one did not feel any warmth. The food which we took to work caused additional and unexpected problems. We began to miss fats because parcels from relatives arrived only once a month if at all. I used to take four pieces of dry black bread with me to work. Because of the transportation difficulties between the district town and Rechnaya there was no white flour. However, the warehouse in Rechnaya had a sufficient supply of coarse rye flour. The quality of our bread became terrible. According to governmental regulations 1 kilogram of flour should yield 1.68 kilograms of bread. Our baker used to add a lot of water to the flour and did not bake the bread sufficiently long. If he managed to get more than a 168% yield (and that was usually the case!), he could steal some flour. The resulting bread resembled clay or a wet sponge and at -30°C (-22°F) it froze into a piece of ice. We tried to wrap the bread in pieces of rags and carry it inside our padded jackets but it did not do any good. Finally, we arrived at the following solution. At "mealtime" when we sat around the bonfire, we would spear a piece of bread on a stick or a small branch and toast it over the fire. That smoked and frequently burnt black bread was our only nourishment at work. Frostbite was our greatest enemy during that winter. Despite warm hats and earmuffs there were frequent cases of frostbitten faces, hands and ears. I had frostbitten cheeks and the tip of my nose which for many winters, even after our departure from the Soviet Union, looked as if it were dirty. Since there was no wind in the forest and the air was dry, one did not even feel when one was being

frostbitten until it was too late to do something about it.

Around January 20th the cold became worse. "Epiphany Frosts" (again according to the Julian calendar), the Russians told us. One morning the air was so cold and dry that one could hardly breathe because the nostrils felt clogged. I returned to the barracks and took a scarf which I tied around my face covering both the tip of my nose and my chin. I had to leave one nostril uncovered, however, so my eyeglasses would not steam up. We went to the administration office to find out whether or not we would go to work. The manager brought out a thermometer and looked at it. "-32°(C or -26°F)" he announced. "Go to work immediately. When it is -35° (-31°F) or colder, we will not send you to the forest." It became progressively colder during the day. The horses grew white "beards" from their breadth which froze around their nostrils and mouths. I could not work at all because my eyeglasses iced up from the heat of my face. When I took them off I could not see anything I have been very nearsighted. I approached the forest master in charge of the carters and asked him for permission to go home. He refused explaining that he did not have the authority to make that decision. However, since I was unable to work I should not do anything and just wait for the end of the workday. In the evening I returned to the barracks totally frozen. My uncle said that when the manager brought out the thermometer in the morning to announce the temperature, it was actually -42°C (-44°F) and at noon the temperature dropped to -46°C (-51°F). According to regulations pertaining to outdoor work we should not have been sent to the forest that morning. I could not warm up until I gulped half glass of vodka. When I tried to take off my felt boots, the right one came off but the left one did not budge. After some time when my foot thawed it began to hurt. The burning pain was excruciating, and when I finally pulled off the felt boot, there was snow inside it and two of the toes on my left foot were frostbitten. One of the neighbors advised kerosene applications. The pain was unbearable. I could not sleep for two nights, because I had 2nd degree frostbite. That day approximately 50% of the workers became frostbitten. I did not leave the barracks for two weeks and could only return to work during the third week. Shortly thereafter, at the end of February, I received a 120 ruble bonus for achieving forty norms.

Around the same time an accident happened to my horse. I had just unloaded a log at the railroad siding and wanted the horse and the empty sled to back up. There were no lumber obstacles on the snow; the area was perfectly even. I pulled back the reins with my left hand and the sled with the right one to make it easier for my "Grasshopper." She backed up two steps and fell in the snow. I unhitched her and she got up with difficulty. I hitched her back to the sled and when she made a few steps I noticed that the horse was limping. I was mortified and called the forest master. He examined the horse and the site of the accident and told me to return to the stable and see the veterinarian. The vet examined the horse, did not find anything wrong with her, and told me to return to work but to put smaller loads on the sled. I worked with "Grasshopper," but she continued to limp and was finally exempted from work. I was assigned a new horse, "Roulette," an old large gray mare with a big head and peculiar nostrils. I used to say she had a "pug nose," and for some reason I imagined she looked like Don Quixote's Rosinante. "Roulette" was a very good horse, but was also very high strung. When she could not pull the load on her first try, she would stomp her front legs as if she were tap dancing.

The Hospitalization

In the middle of March one of my wisdom teeth began to hurt. I made an appointment with Joe, the dentist, who diagnosed my problem as otitis which had developed into an abscess. The tooth still had an old filling from my Warsaw times which Joe removed. Nevertheless, the pain did not go away but started radiating toward my ear. My face became swollen on that side and I was excused from going to work by the physician. After a few days the NKVD commandant showed up in our barracks to check whether I was faking my illness. I was far from it, however, because I already had locked jaws and could only take liquids. The physician referred me to the hospital, the commandant issued a pass and on my birthday, early in the morning, I set out for the district hospital. With a 99.5° fever and weakened by my overall condition, I just felt plain miserable. I put on some warm clothes and my uncle escorted me to the train. I got into the caboose, which had an iron stove in the middle of it and wooden benches along the walls, and started on my trip to the district hospital. Around 1 p.m. the train arrived at Rechnaya and from there I had to walk to the district hospital unless a cart or a wagon happened to go in the same direction and I could possibly hitch a ride. My condition worsened. My jaw hurt, and I knew I had high fever. I started walking toward the Volga River. No carts or wagons were going in that direction, but I met an old peasant who was also going to the district town and joined him. I felt progressively worse. The old man said that it was 15 kilometers (about 9.5 miles) because the road across the frozen river was not straight but winding. I could barely drag myself and was afraid that I would just collapse before reaching my destination. I rested, frequently and the old peasant worried that we would not get to town before dark and we would be attacked by wolves. Finally after a five-hour walk I dragged myself to the hospital entrance. Immediately an old nurse took me to a bathroom, and I was only too happy to take a bath. Then she gave me a hospital gown and showed me my bed. I was placed in the "pus ward." The nurse took my temperature which was above 104°F. The physician, a very pleasant sixty-year old man, came in the evening, examined me and prescribed a hot compress. He also said that if the abscess did not break during the night the pus would have to be released by lancing under the jaw. During the night my temperature became even higher, I became delirious, and the pain kept me from getting any sleep. Every once in a while the old nurse would come and feed me some powders which did not help at all.

In the morning the abscess broke, a half glass of pus came out and I immediately felt better. The doctor arrived at about nine o'clock. He examined me and prescribed hot compresses and heat lamp treatment. After the doctor's visit each patient received breakfast. Once breakfast was over I began getting acquainted with the other patients on my ward. They were peasants from neighboring collective farms, all of whom were old and sickly. Upon discovering that I was a foreigner they started asking me questions about life in Poland and whether or not we had collective farms. "You must have lived well," they said "If there were no collective farms and everybody was his own boss." On our ward there were twelve beds, and not all of them were occupied. The patients were mostly men and only three were very old women. On my way to the electrotherapy building I was able to see the whole hospital which consisted of several well-kept and clean buildings. Despite tremendous difficulties and shortages of medicines, linens and instrumentation the hospital maintained a high level of professionalism thanks to the devotion of Doctor Petrov, the director and surgeon. The food in the hospital was not bad either. Breakfast consisted of a white roll, a twenty-gram lump of sugar and a mug of tea. For dinner we received some kind of soup with groats, a fifty-gram (almost two ounces) piece of meat and a tablespoon of oatmeal. Supper consisted of a small plate of oatmeal. When Doctor Petrov discovered that I was a third-year medical student, he took a personal interest in my recovery. During one of our conversations the good doctor told me that before the revolution he had studied medicine at the famous Kazan University, where he became friends with Professor F. Orłowski from Warsaw. I told Doctor Petrov that Prof. Orłowski was the head of the Internal Medicine Department at the Medical Faculty of Warsaw University. Doctor Petrov asked me to convey to Prof. Orłowski his best regards upon my return to Poland. After nine days I left the hospital. "Come back some time." said Doctor Petrov as he bid me farewell. "Better not." I thought.

Outside one could almost smell spring. It was the beginning of April, the sun shone brightly, the snow started to melt and large puddles full of water and manure were all over the streets. Fortunately, when leaving the settlement for the hospital I had taken my shoes, so that now I could wear them and carry my felt boots. I began to look for a way to get to Rechnaya. I was too weak after my hospital stay to undertake a fifteen-kilometer trip on foot and decided to find a sleigh going in that direction. I went to the

market place. A few sleighs were standing there but none were going to Rechnaya. Resigned I went to the restaurant, sat down at a table already occupied by a customer and ordered dinner: cucumber soup with meat. The man observed me carefully. I also noticed that he must have been a stranger and a city dweller judging from his clothes. We started talking and it turned out that he lived in Engels, a city down the Volga River, in the German Region. We talked partially in Russian and partially in German. My companion told me some interesting things. The Volga German Region was in the general area of Saratov, a large city on the banks of the Lower Volga. The inhabitants of the Region were the descendants of German colonists brought by Catherine the Great from Germany to Russia in the XVIIIth century. They retained their language and customs, and had the richest collective farms in that territory. The administration and militia were their own people, and their language was German. We sat and talked until closing time. After saying goodbye, I took the road down to the Volga, hoping for a better chance on the river bank of catching a sleigh going to Rechnaya. Sure enough, after a half-hour's wait I found such a sleigh. The old peasant demanded 25 rubles which I gladly paid. I sat down next to him because there were already two old women in the back who were also returning from the hospital. At midnight I arrived at the train station in Rechnaya. The train was not expected until 5:30 in the morning. I stretched out on a bench in a filthy, littered with refuse "waiting room." I did not dare to fall asleep, because there were a few people in the room, and I was afraid they would steal my clothes while I was asleep. At dawn the train with a caboose arrived, and after an hour's trip I found myself back in the camp. Needless to say, my family was happy to see me.

During my absence two significant changes had taken place in the life of our family. My uncle was fired from his job in the office. The whole affair could have had much more serious repercussions than his firing. It seems that one day our neighbor in the barracks, Mrs. Koch, with whom we had traveled in the same car on our trip from Lwow, had an altercation with my aunt about a place at the kitchen stove and went to the NKVD commandant to lodge a complaint against us. She told him that in the evenings there were political meetings in our room, that we were making fun of the Soviet Union and referred to Stalin as "that dimwit." The commandant called in my aunt and uncle, bawled them out and threatened to imprison all of us so that "we would never see the outside world." My aunt and uncle were crushed but, at least for the time being, the incident ended with my uncle losing his office job. The Poles in the settlement reacted to this first case of blatant denunciation by ostracizing members of the Koch family. Whether in the mess hall, in line to the commissary or just passing by on the road, people would not greet them, would turn away and generally behaved as if the Kochs were simply nonexistent. All of the exiles sympathized with us and those who were on good terms with the NKVD commandant attempted to defuse the whole situation.

The next morning after my return from the hospital I reported for work, was assigned a mediocre horse and rejoined my team. There was also some excitement at work. One of the Russian carters, Kirilov, was fulfilling three and four norms daily. Even the regional newspaper carried articles about his achievements. I decided to investigate his method of hauling logs and maybe learn a trick or two. First of all Kirilov had the best horse in the stable which could easily haul two-cubic meter logs. Secondly he used special sleds. The shafts of those sleds with the horse between them could be easily unhooked from the sled. Thirdly Kirilov had four loaders to help him and used three sleds. He employed the following method of hauling logs from the clearing to the railroad siding. Two men loaded a log on an empty sled in the forest. Kirilov would arrive from the railroad siding with an empty sled, unhook the shafts with the horse between them from that sled, hook them to the loaded sled and ride back to the railroad siding. There he would unhook the shafts and transfer them with the horse to an empty sled which had been brought by Kirilov during his previous trip and left to be unloaded by the other two men, while he would take the empty sled back to the forest and pick up a loaded one. Thirdly his clearing was only 450-600 feet from the railroad siding. Thus Kirilov's "work" consisted of driving a sled, empty or loaded, between the forest and the railroad siding and yelling at the horse. No wonder he was fulfilling three and four norms daily under those conditions! In our teams we had two loaders for four carters which forced each carter to unload his sled, because the two loaders were all the time in the forest helping with loading the logs. We also used just ordinary sleds. While speaking of stakhanovites in our camp one would be remiss not to mention several exiles who fulfilled 115% of daily norm using bucksaws. Also in one of the neighboring settlements there was a Russian carter who received a gold watch from Stalin inscribed "For the best stakhanovite of the Republic. Y. V. Stalin." This carter had a horse that he trained to back up, jerk, turn left or right, etc. by responding to his master's different whistles.

The First (And The Last) Spring In The Camp

In the middle of April the weather became warm and the snow began to melt rapidly. The "winter" railroad track laid on the snow was dismantled and work in the forest stopped for a week. Big puddles of water were all over the settlement and we did not leave the barracks unless it was absolutely necessary. Our outhouse was located about thirty feet from the barracks, and it was difficult to reach it. With the warmer temperature, going to the outhouse was not nearly as cumbersome as during the winter when one had to pull down one's pants and underwear in zero degree (F) cold. Having a lot of free time during that week people occupied themselves by discussing the war. The Germans had conquered the Balkan countries, and the question on everybody's mind was "which country next?" We sensed that a German-Soviet confrontation was inevitable in the near future and that was our only hope; hope of freedom.

May Day, the second most important holiday in the Soviet Union, was rapidly approaching. Again there were hard candies, cigarettes, soap and vodka in the commissary. On May Day, Joe the Dentist and engineer Berger with his wife came to our barracks. They brought vodka, and we provided "the appetizers," black bread thinly smeared with lard and topped with a slice of raw onion. We repeatedly toasted "our quick departure from this God forsaken camp." Joe got drunk, walked down the steps backwards bowing deeply all the time, announced that he was going home to sleep and walked backwards in the general direction of his barracks. After a half-hour Joe's wife came by inquiring if her husband had stopped for a visit. We felt guilty but decided to lie. Several hours later one of Joe's brothers-in-law found him snoring in some ditch.

In the beginning of June I accumulated 40 norms, received a bonus and a few days later was transferred with a big fuss to tree falling. It turned out that "Grasshopper," the mare with whom I worked during the winter hauling and distributing railroad ties, and the same one which was limping after an accident, had given birth to a foal in the beginning of May. The colt was very pretty and healthy. One night when he was sucking, the mother slipped in her stall and smothered him. Because she had weak legs, she could not get up and the foal died. When I reported for work next morning, the NKVD commandant was waiting for me and started yelling: "You murdered a horse! I am going to report you to the prosecutor's office! When you get a five-year prison term then maybe you will learn how to respect Soviet property! You and your family are low-down saboteurs! All of you, Poles, are hitlerite whores!" I was dumbfounded and totally unaware of the reason for commandant's outburst until the stable foreman told me about the accident and said that I would be transferred to tree falling. I told him I was happy to rid myself of him and his lousy horses, and if he reports me to the prosecutor's office, I will prove that it was the stablemen's fault because they slept all night instead of watching horses. That day I went to the forest to saw two-meter logs. Since I was entitled to 50% above the usual pay because of having accumulated forty norms, the decrease in my earnings was insignificant.

Around the same time the settlement was aroused by a scandal. It turned out that one of the Polish women, who worked as a cleaning person and a night duty telephone operator in the office, was six months pregnant. This in itself would not have been so sensational if not for the fact that she was not close with anyone but confessed to the camp physician that she had been raped by the manager one night. When the NKVD commandant found out about it, he notified the District Committee of the Party and the office of the District Prosecutor. The manager was immediately relieved of his duties, had to surrender his party membership card and was arrested. After a few days of imprisonment the manager was let out and given some desk job in the Forestry Bureau offices in Rechnaya. He promised to support the child.

Again the hot June weather was upon us with the buzzing flies and the stinging mosquitoes which made us miserable at work. My uncle went to the district town in order to appear before a medical commission and have his invalid status extended. He returned after a couple of days bringing with him a few kilograms of meat and honey. The more affluent exiles gratefully bought those things and we kept one kilogram of meat and one of honey as our "profit." The forest was full of raspberries and my aunt, with Kathy as well as other women, brought bucketfuls of luscious raspberries home every day. At that time they became our main staple next to bread. From time to time Polana would bring a little cranberry preserves, a piece of cheese or a few pickles from the commissary. For the past several months he had become the "right-hand man" of Yakovlev, the commissary salesman, as well as of the NKVD commandant and had access to those "goodies." We were assigned plots of land for planting potatoes

and vegetables. One Sunday some of us got together, brought manure from the stable and ploughed our plot. Every day of the following week we planted potatoes and vegetables after returning from work. "We won't eat them anyway," the exiles used to say. "They will remain for others." It turned out to be true particularly when Sunday, June 22, 1941, appeared on our calendars.

Beginning Of The End

The morning of that fateful Sunday did not bode anything unusual. Like any other Sunday, we started preparing a supply of firewood for the coming week. Around noon the whole settlement became electrified by the announcement that Molotov, the Commissar of Foreign Affairs (later the title was changed to that of Minister), would speak on the radio at 4:00 p.m. We almost felt it in our bones that something earth shattering would take place at that time. Unfortunately, there was no radio in the settlement, or maybe the NKVD commandant hid it purposely to avoid the possibility of a riot. It was after 6:00 p.m. when like a storm Polana "blew" into our barracks with his shirt unbuttoned, his eyes bloodshot, totally beyond himself and stuttering more than usual: "Eeeengineer! Eeeengineer! Wawawar! Gegegermans bobobombed Kikikiev and Mimiminsk! They crossssed the boboborder!" We breathed a sigh of relief. As we used to say in Poland, "a stone fell down from the heart but...on a painful corn." In everyone's mind there was immediately the question "What will happen to us? If we are considered to be followers of Hitler then it will be our end!" There was no joy among the exiles. We waited and followed the news in the press. Churchill promised to assist the Soviet Union in its struggle against a common enemy. Mobilization notices began to arrive in the settlement. Forest master Grishin and a few other Russians were the first to go. The horses did not escape the mobilization either. Kirilov, the stakhanovite, and one of his sons were to drive them to Moscow. A year had passed since our arrival in the camp, three hundred sixty five days and three hundred sixty five nights. "At this time in Warsaw I would have been taking examinations from the fourth to the final year of my medical studies." I thought with bitterness. I received a letter from my parents posted in the beginning of June, which was their last letter to me. We also received a letter from another one of my father's brothers. He was in Wilno, the letter was posted June 19, 1941, and uncle Henry wrote: "It is very hot here. I sleep in cellars or in attics. It is impossible to sleep in the apartment." How well we understood what "very hot" meant. It was a resettlement action we had experienced the previous year in Lwow. It was too bad that Henry "slept in cellars and attics" because he met his death at the hands of the hitlerites in Ponary Forest near Wilno. Otherwise he might have survived in the Soviet Union. At least the chance was somewhat greater.

Sometime in July Sam Mayer showed up in the settlement. When the Germans were approaching Lwow, he had escaped to the east and returned to the camp from which he had escaped eleven months ago. He simply returned to his family. The NKVD commandant did not know what to do with him, so he arrested Sam and had him locked up in one of the rooms in the NKVD office. The commandant tried to telephone the district office for instructions. By the time the instructions arrived, Sam had spent twenty-four hours in his "cell." The instructions were both simple and surprising: "Release him immediately and do not force him to work because he is now a free citizen."

We spent July 1941 tracing the retreat of the Red Army on newspaper maps and expecting some change in our situation. In the first days of August the regional newspaper printed an item which shook not only our settlement but also thousands of similar settlements and camps with Polish exiles throughout the Soviet Union from the western front to Vladivostok and Kamchatka Peninsula, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Kirgizian Steppes: A POLISH-SOVIET TREATY. According to the article, on July 30, 1941, in London, a treaty between Poland and the Soviet Union was signed by Gen. Wladyslaw Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile and Commander-in-Chief of Polish Armed Forces, and by Ambassador Maiski, representing the Soviet Union. The main points of the treaty were: (1) abrogation of all treaties and agreements made by either side in 1939, and (2) amnesty for all Polish prisoners of war as well as civilians; i.e. exiles, political prisoners, etc. The Polish exiles in our camp went absolutely wild. They kissed one another with tears pouring down their cheeks. The industrial manager and the NKVD commandant became worried that we would stop working. How wrong they were! Wild joy overtook our bodies and our minds! All of a sudden it seemed like the whole world was smiling at us: the forest, the trees and even the horses. Two weeks later another bit of news printed in the regional paper shook the exiles: the signing of a Polish-Soviet military agreement about the formation of Polish Army units on the territory of the Soviet Union for the purpose of fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Red Army against the common enemy, Hitler's Germany, and the arrival in the Soviet Union of Minister-Plenipotentiary Dr. Retinger and Gen. Bohusz-Szyszko.

One day the commandant announced that people should come to his office and register in order to obtain new documents. Since he needed someone who could write in Russian, the commandant sent

Polana for my uncle. The registration lasted one whole day and night. If the registrants wanted to leave the settlement, they could select a city or town from a list shown to them. Those who wished to remain were promised almost anything. No wonder! The whole industrial plan of the regional forest industry would be jeopardized by the sudden disappearance of the laborers. Nevertheless, everyone selected some generally unknown city or town because it was located somewhere in the southern part of the Soviet Union. The militiaman on duty at the telephone frequently added new names of localities in which we could settle to the list. My uncle, being in charge of the registration, waited with registering our family until the name of some well known city would appear on the list where we could settle: he in a factory as an engineer and I in a hospital or in a medical school. In the morning the militiaman added the last name to the list: Ulyanovsk. Those present at that moment in the commandant's office; i.e. my uncle and the last two exiles, registered to go to that city. Ulyanovsk, formerly Symbirsk, was an old city with factories and a university. It was located on the banks of the central part of the Volga River. The registration was over.

After several days, on Sunday, September 8, 1941, we were asked to report to a meeting in front of the Administration Office. When everyone was there, a fat militia major, who had arrived from the capital of the republic, accompanied by the regional NKVD commandant and the industrial manager of the settlement, mounted a podium. The crowd calmed down and the major said: "Citizen Poles! The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet has granted amnesty to all Polish citizens incarcerated in labor camps, concentration camps, prisons and prisoner of war camps. Now you have the same rights and privileges as those of Soviet citizens. In Buzuluk, in the Chkalov Province, Polish Army units are being formed and they will fight shoulder to shoulder with our heroic Red Army against the hated common enemy. You can live and work wherever you wish except the border zone, the combat zone and several selected cities. We supplied you with a list of localities where you can settle. Go there, find work and when the war is over you will return to Poland." After the major finished, the industrial manager announced that those of us who wish to remain would be able to sign very favorable work contracts with the Forestry Bureau. He encouraged us to remain in the settlement and not to chance "going into the unknown." Finally the NKVD commandant said that shortly he would announce the time when the new documents would be distributed to us. People were elated. Some returned to their barracks. My uncle, Joe the Dentist, engineer Berger, myself and a few others went to the barracks on Red Hill where someone had a map of the Soviet Union. Half-hour later Polana came running with the message that my uncle was asked to come to the office. Anticipating some unpleasantness I joined him. Fifteen minutes later my uncle left the office quite upset, and we went home. It turned out the industrial manager and the regional NKVD commandant had demanded from my uncle that he urge the people to remain in the settlement. "You can persuade them. They will listen to you." said the manager. My uncle refused saying that he had no influence on the exiles and would persuade no one to do anything. The regional NKVD commandant became furious and started yelling: "You visit the barracks on Red Hill and tell people to leave the camp! You and your nephew are well-known enemies of the Soviet Union and the Soviet system! I will teach you a lesson! I won't give you your documents and you will remain in this place!" We were heartbroken by the prospect of not receiving new documents. There was no way to appeal to anyone because even the NKVD major had left for other camps. A few minutes later Polana, who was eavesdropping behind a partition in the Administration Office, came running into our room. Stuttering more than usual he said: "Engineer! Dododon't worry! They jujust wawant you and Mike (that's me!) to stay puput in the babarracks! You wiwill be the last to get those papapers!" And making sure that the Koch family could hear behind the partition added before leaving: "The whole thing is bebecause of that Koch bibitch!"

People began to pick up their new documents and their "bosses" tried to convince them to remain in the settlement. In the evening Polana brought the message for us to appear in the NKVD commandant's office and pick up our documents. Each document was a printed sheet of paper on which first and last names, birth date, birthplace and the selected destination were written in ink. In the upper left-hand corner was the inscription "Commissariat for Internal Affairs of X Republic, Y City" and the serial number. In the center at the top of the page the word "Certificate," then the following text: "Issued to citizen Z, born on such and such day, month, year, in such and such city, who has been granted amnesty as a Polish citizen by the decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, dated ...1941. Said citizen has the right to live, work and move within the territory of the Soviet Union except for cities supported by the state (e.g. Moscow, Leningrad, etc.), border zone, and combat zone. Citizen Z is going to Ulyanovsk, selected as his permanent place of residence." The paper was signed by the NKVD

commandant of the republic, the regional commandant of NKVD and made official by the ever important "round seal."

With the coveted documents in our hands, we began to think about our departure. From conversations with our NKVD commandant it seemed that one did not necessarily have to go to the selected locality. At a "family council" in which Joe the Dentist, participated, it was decided that he and my uncle would go to Kazan, where some cousins of my aunt lived. Maybe it would be feasible to settle there and if not at least the two of them would be able to get some advice from people familiar with life in the Soviet Union. Two days later they departed. In the meantime people began to leave the camp. Single men and women left for Buzuluk to join the Polish Army units. Others with families left for cities selected in the southern parts of Soviet Union because of the warmer climate.

My uncle and Joe returned after a week. They had had a good trip, because (as they reported) they spent most of the time in toilets where there was running water, and one could defecate in a sitting position, a thrilling luxury after fourteen months of squatting. Except for those advantages, everything else looked hopeless. The German army was at the doorsteps of Leningrad and Moscow. The inhabitants were being evacuated from those cities and the boats on the Volga River were full of evacuees. The information brought from Kazan was hardly encouraging. My aunt's cousins lived in one small room which they already shared with some evacuees from Moscow. It was impossible to find any living quarters in the city because of the influx of evacuees. Even prior to that deluge there had been no available apartments. The militia did not register any more newcomers but shipped them out. One evening my aunt's cousins locked the doors and in a whisper described to my uncle life in the Soviet Union. Every once in a while they would check to see whether someone was not eavesdropping in the hallway. Their stories were tragic: about a life with no future, an unbelievably low standard of living, more vegetating than living, a constant fear of the NKVD and of imprisonment and no hope of anything, not even for the improvement of living conditions. Well, we crossed Kazan off of our list of possible localities.

Another group of "scouts" returned from the regional town located up the Volga and a few hours by motorboat, where the possibility of getting settled existed. The town boasted various offices, a factory manufacturing heavy leather gloves for work in the forest and a factory making light summer footwear. We decided to move there. Joe, who saw the possibility of starting a dental practice in that town, decided to join us with the whole Mayer family. Our departure had to be temporarily postponed for one simple reason: we were penniless. It seemed that even in the most hopeless moments and even in the Soviet Union a miracle can take place. One day I received two 22-pound parcels with food and clothing from my relatives in the USA. A few days later a third parcel arrived. All three parcels had been rifled and many items like a watch, two scarves, cigarettes, chocolate and hard candies were missing. The militia immediately prepared a report, the thief was supposedly apprehended but by that time we had left the settlement.

After receiving the "American parcels" we immediately started turning part of their contents into cash. Many farmers from distant collective farms used to come to the settlement and bring meat, butter and honey for sale or for barter. Because of the war prices started to become inflated but were not too much as yet. A pound of pork cost 6-7 rubles, a pound of honey 9 rubles and a pound of butter 18 rubles. Stepan Pavlovich, the head accountant, bought a shirt from me for 70 rubles and a Parker fountain pen for 35 rubles and 2 pounds of honey. Yakovlev, the commissary salesman, bought three yards of material for 650 rubles. For the acquired cash we bought several pounds of meat, butter and honey, packed our belongings and decided that September 22, 1941, would be our departure date. We were some of the last ex-exiles to leave the camp hoping that it would be easier to get to the Volga River because only a few flatcars were made available for the departing people. We also hoped that the later we left the less crowded it would be on the flatcars.

Free At Last!

It was raining on the day of our departure just as it had been on the day of our arrival in the camp. We loaded our belongings on the flatcar but it was so full of people and their luggage that we had to stand all the way and in a very uncomfortable position. Nevertheless we were happy to leave the forest behind. The Berger family was traveling on the same flatcar. Engineer Berger decided to settle in the regional town. Finally the train arrived at the same wharf where we had been unloaded fourteen months before. We had to vacate the flatcars immediately so they could be sent back to the camp for more people. With great difficulty we found a room in a hut whose owners permitted us to spend the night. There were 10 adults, 3 children and 32 pieces of luggage in one room. Traveling farther did not look too encouraging. The motorboat traveling up the river was supposed to arrive at 8 o'clock in the morning. Because the water level in the Volga was very low, the boat moored at an island in the middle of the river. The island, about 100 yards in diameter, could be reached by a rowboat. That evening we ate a communal supper to which we also invited our host and his brother. A bottle of vodka appeared on the table and then a second one. By the time both bottles were empty, our plan of action was firmly established. It was decided that the host and his brother will be handsomely paid to ferry all of us and our belongings to the island. We went to sleep on the floor without getting undressed. We got up at 3 o'clock in the morning and started carrying our luggage to the bank of the Volga in the dark. There were five men so each of us had to carry six pieces of luggage. It was no easy job because the river bank was high, steep and slippery. We thought we would be the first ones on the island. It turned out others had the same idea and luggage was being carried out to the river from all huts. When all our belongings were down at the edge of the river, it turned out that the rowboat could not come in close enough because railroad ties and logs were floating in the water. Consequently, we had to carry our luggage to the boat over rolling logs; no easy task. The boat trip to the island followed by carrying of the luggage from one side of the island to the opposite side reminded me of the well-known problem about the fisherman who had to transfer a goat, a wolf and a head of cabbage by boat across a river while only two of them could be in the boat at the same time. We had a similar problem because all of the belongings had to be ferried twice. Someone had to watch them, someone else had to load and ferry them, and then it was necessary to carry the luggage across the island and to watch it on both sides of the island. Carrying the luggage across the island was a very difficult task because the island was actually a sand reef with a sand hill in the middle of it so our legs sank in to our ankles in the sand and we also had to surmount the hill. Most carried their own belongings but some people had such heavy trunks they were forced to hire others to carry them.

When the day started breaking, the people looked like paratroopers dropped to secure an enemy island. By the time it got completely light, women and children were already ferried to the island. Suddenly a strong cold wind started blowing from the north. We made bonfires and heated water in order to warm up. Eight o'clock came and went but no trace of the motorboat. A watchman in the guardhouse said that the boat which was full of recruits had gone to a town downriver and would be back by 10 or 11 o'clock. We waited patiently and drank hot water.

The motorboat arrived at noon. A gangplank was dropped from the boat to the bank. It was very steep and one could scale it only by crawling. People pushed toward the boat, some fell into the river, yelling, crying and cursing filled the air. Our group did not stay behind and using our elbows and knees managed to reach the deck and get on it our women, children and luggage. The boat could not take all the people and there were many cases when only part of a family with part of the luggage got on the boat, while the rest of it with part of their bundles, boxes and suitcases remained on the island. I must add at this point that traveling in that period of time in particular just like traveling in general in the Soviet Union was not limited to 2-3 suitcases per person. People moved from place to place taking with them all their pitiful belongings including buckets, pots, teakettles, samovars, primuses (portable kerosene burners), etc. Suitcases were not available. Instead the Russians used bundles of all sizes and shapes, trunks made of plywood or osier, or backpacks made out of old flour sacks.

The captain gave an order to remove the gangplank. People who had become separated shouted names of places where they planned to meet. The motorboat whistled shrilly and pulled away from the island. We were on our way into a new free life! With no regrets whatsoever we left behind the settlement, the forest, the horses, the saws and the axes. We experienced a lot during our fourteen months in the camp. There were sad moments and gay ones but always in the shadow of captivity and imprisonment.

Hundreds of thousands of Polish exiles in the vast territory of the Soviet Union were leaving prisons, settlements, labor and prison camps with no regrets but with the hope of freedom, of free life. How naive they were! Little did they realize that the whole Soviet Union was one giant prison!

In the meantime the motorboat stopped at the wharf of the regional town. Some passengers alighted in order to wait for a motorboat going downriver. They removed their belongings and placed them on the bank because the waiting room was full of people and luggage. Crowds of people with their belongings waited for motorboats going downriver. Alas those arriving from upriver were packed with evacuees from Moscow, Leningrad and other cities, and did not take on any passengers at all. People camped for days in that waiting room sitting on their bundles. They did not look even for temporary accommodations. Because the motorboats had no time schedules, it was impossible to predict when one of the large boats going way down south would have room for some passengers. It was a thorny road that road to freedom, but people were undaunted! After two hours of traveling we reached our goal. It was 6 p.m. and impossible to find any lodgings. We slept on our belongings in the waiting room of the river harbor, taking turns to guard them so that nothing would be stolen because there were plenty of thieves around.

In the morning a few of the men went to look for some quarters. They returned several hours later having found a room in the basement of some house. We rented a cart, put our belongings onto it and moved them from the waiting room to the rented quarters. Although the room was quite large, it turned out to be too small for the two families; i.e. ours and Joe, the Dentist's, the Mayers. Temporarily there was no other choice. The landlord and his wife, very nice and understanding couple, tried to facilitate our getting settled. Despite their good intentions, there was not much they could do. They owned the house, an old wooden two-story building with broken windows replaced by panels removed from plywood boxes. The house reminded me of the one described by Maxim Gorki in his book "Childhood." The landlords occupied the first floor while the second one was rented to some tenants.

We decided to look over the situation and went to town. The name of the town was Ivanovo, and it was a regional center. Ivanovo was surrounded by forests with hundreds of camps like the one we left behind. In the center of town was a plant manufacturing leather goods which barely showed any signs of life or work activity. Not too far from the plant and near the market place was the city park, a grassy area surrounded by a broken fence and with a bust of Lenin in the center. Across from the park, in an old hunting lodge of Russian tsars, was the *Raispolkom* (the Regional Executive Committee of the Peasants' and Workers' Soviet). Not too far from it were buildings housing the *Raikom* (the Regional Communist Party Committee), with a red wooden speaker's platform in front of it, the regional offices of NKVD and the militia, and the prison. We went to the regional store. All shelves were filled match boxes. One could also get a couple of spools of thread in exchange for a few kilograms of rags or for a skin from a sheep or a goat. We bought a few boxes of matches and went to the restaurant. Again the same cabbage or cucumber soup and a little oatmeal with a tablespoonful of sunflower oil poured over it. There was no meat available due to war shortages. In the restaurant we met a large number of Poles who had worked in labor camps in the region and now headed to southern parts of the Soviet Union or to join the Polish Army. Nobody wanted to look for work in Ivanovo. "The authorities will not permit to settle here anyway." one of those present remarked.

The next day it was raining cats and dogs. All the streets turned into one large mud pool and one had to walk carefully to keep from falling into one of the deep puddles full of water. I put on my American galoshes and we went into town to look for work. Alas all of our efforts were fruitless. The factory manager directed us to the *Raispolkom*, the *Raispolkom* to the *Raikom*, and the *Raikom* to the NKVD where we were told we would not be permitted to settle in the town. "Go where you are supposed to settle." said the NKVD commandant. "They might have told you that you have the right to settle wherever you want but your authorities cannot order me to register you. I don't want to do it and am telling you to leave this town immediately!" Our hopes of finding work and remaining burst like a soap bubble. We wasted several days going from one office to another and from one bureaucrat to the next one. Finally after holding a "powwow" it was decided to leave the town. After establishing the date of our departure we started preparing for the trip and picked up rationing coupons for bread, which were given by right to all evacuees. Joe, the Dentist, and the Mayer family decided to return to the settlement because they had no financial means to travel to Ulyanovsk. Our family did not want to return. We were sick and tired of the

work in the forest, and we were enemies of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet system in the eyes of the authorities (they were correct in this respect!). The day before our scheduled departure we went to a neighboring village about half-mile from Ivanovo to buy some tobacco. The previous evening our landlord had arrived with the exciting news that the store in that village was full of Azerbaidzhan tobacco, first quality (no less!) at 6 rubles for a 200 gram package. We bought several packages and wanted to try out the tobacco. Unfortunately, none of us brought any matches. We wanted to buy a box in the store but there were none; only tobacco. We encountered another one of the numerous paradoxes of life in the Soviet Union. In this store there was plenty of tobacco but no matches, and in the Raimag (regional store) in Ivanovo, barely half-mile away there were matches but no tobacco!

The next day we again rented a wagon, bid farewell to our landlords who were happy with the rent for a room we hardly used, and went to the wharf. We said goodbye to Joe, the Dentist, and the Mayer family who were returning to the settlement and boarded their motorboat when it arrived. (Five years later I met Joe, his wife and son in Poland and then again 26 years later when I visited Poland with my American wife and our two daughters.) We remained at the wharf waiting for a motorboat which would take us down the Volga River. The harbor master announced that a boat should arrive in the early evening but one could never be sure whether it would arrive on time or late in the evening, at night or maybe not earlier than next day. The availability of spaces on the boat would determine whether or not any tickets would be sold. As we traveled on the Volga we had had ample opportunity to notice that the boats were full of people and, therefore, the possibility of getting tickets minimal. Although several boats traveling down the river passed by our harbor, none stopped, because they were all full. In the meantime my uncle, who had a most unusual gift of striking acquaintanceships with people, became friends with the harbor master and a gift of a half-pint of vodka immediately secured tickets for our family in spite of the fact that the boat was expected after midnight. We put Kathy to sleep on two of the bundles with our bedding and waited for the boat. The motorboat, "Marshal Voroshilov," arrived at 2 a.m. and was so full that the cashier did not even bother to open the window of his office to sell tickets. There were several people waiting at the wharf but we were the only ones to board the boat. It was so terribly full that we barely found some space in the hallway of the 4th class. We made a pile out of our belongings and put Kathy on top of it. My aunt and I set on the floor next to it so that nobody would steal anything while my uncle went reconnoitering. He returned after an hour quite perturbed. All hallways were full of people. The sleeping area of the 4th class, which had bunk beds, was so crowded that one could not even get inside the doorway. Passengers were lying in bunks and on the floor like sardines in a can. The stench was just awful and people were so full of lice that they were scratching themselves in their sleep. Consequently, we were forced to travel in the hallway for a week. It was so crowded that we had to sit with our legs folded underneath us and take turns sitting because there was just sufficient sitting room for three persons only. So when my uncle was sitting, I had to stand and vice versa.

Before 4 a.m. our boat stopped at the wharf of the regional town. My uncle went to the railing at the gangway to look for anyone from our camp. After a while he returned with Polana, who was so excited by meeting us that he stuttered more than usual but nevertheless managed to tell us some interesting stories. The freed exiles were still sitting at the wharf unable to board any of the boats. Only single individuals with no luggage had had a chance to squeeze onto a boat; those with families and luggage had none. A number of people who had traveled down the river had to return because they were not permitted to disembark in the localities they had selected. They gave up and many returned to the settlement. "Sooner or later all of them will return." Polana said with conviction. And no wonder. He became the industrial manager's right-hand man and the two of them tried to persuade people to return to the settlement promising them "pie in the sky." "Eengineer, youyou go f farther" he added goodheartedly. "Neneither you nonor Mike (that's me!) has annnything to do there!" We parted cordially and promised to keep in touch through Joe, the Dentist.

We traveled for three more days surviving on our supply of bread and honey washed down with hot water. During that time we had an opportunity to look around the boat. Most of the passengers were evacuees from Moscow, Leningrad, the Kalinin Province and from the border with the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. There were a few Poles on the boat, primarily single young men who had been imprisoned in prison camps around Moscow and to the north of that city. They were able to reach the Volga River sooner than those incarcerated in the Far North and now were on their way south to join the Polish Army. All of the evacuees were exhausted by the long journey, sick, full of vermin and had no hope

for the future. They were being sent to the Kuban, the richest and most fertile area of the southern Ukraine. The situation in the 3rd class was no better than in the 4th one. However, the 1st and 2nd classes differed from the other two. Cabins and sitting rooms were elegantly furnished. There was even a dining room which served three meals daily but only for passengers in those two classes. We met a university professor from Leningrad, a pleasant and cultured chap, who decided to leave that endangered city with his mother and move south. On this boat we encountered the hypocrisy of Soviet life for the first time. Class equality existed only in theory. Actually there were big class differences. The Soviet system created a new aristocracy composed of party and armed services dignitaries and, to a lesser extent, the intelligentsia, as represented by university professors, etc. A special highest class of this new Soviet aristocracy was represented by the NKVD. After the war these class differences became even more pronounced with the appearance of the armed services officers class and the class of Heroes of the Soviet Union. Passengers in the 1st and 2nd classes represented the new Soviet aristocracy: superior looking officers and superior acting party dignitaries with their wives in colorful summer dresses and their children in outgrown clothes. The passengers in the 3rd and 4th classes were blue and white collar workers, and a swarm of tramps, thieves and homeless children. The homeless children had made their first appearance during the Civil War and were still plaguing the Soviet society almost quarter of a century after the "Great October Revolution."

On the second day of our trip we arrived at Kazan. First we tied up at the freight terminal where all kinds of military equipment were loaded on the boat, then we moved to the passenger pier where no passengers were permitted to get off except for a few "aristocrats." A group of mobilized Tatars was escorted onto the boat to the accompaniment of crying and wailing women bidding them farewell. They were placed on the open deck. During the day we stopped at several small town piers loading mobilized men to the accompaniment of wailing and outbursts of hysteria by their women. On the third day my uncle became friendly with an old steward from 2nd class. The old man bought from us a pair of socks for 25 *rubles* and a union suit for 125 *rubles*, and threw in three plates of soup for good measure.

At about 3 p.m. the boat docked at the Ulyanovsk freight terminal. Again it took on a load of military equipment and mobilized men. We started getting ready to get off the boat but it was not certain that it would dock at the passenger terminal. After a short time the boat pulled away from the pier and docked at the passenger terminal. Alas, it was impossible to disembark. Several militiamen stood at the gangway and did not permit anyone to leave the boat. Neither our explanations nor the fact that the name of the city was written on our documents did any good. On the pier we noticed some of our acquaintances from the camp waiting for a boat going down the river. They had arrived two days before having selected Ulyanovsk as their destination to get settled but the local militia had refused to register them and told them to get out of the city immediately. So they had been waiting for two days on the pier under the watchful eyes of the militiamen on duty and attempting to board a boat going south. We were crushed. Our bread supply was running out and rolls or bread sold at the stops were extremely expensive. In this situation we had no hope of getting off of the damned boat before Astrakhan, a city on the Caspian Sea in the delta of the Volga River, where the boats turned around for their return trip north. And, of course, there was no guarantee that the passengers would be permitted to disembark in Astrakhan. Maybe we would be ordered to travel back north and our boat would become kind of a "ghost ship" plying the Volga River north and south without taking on any passengers or letting any get off. One of the passengers, a militia officer, who witnessed our conversation with the militiamen at the gangway and tried unsuccessfully to intervene on our behalf, suggested that we disembark at the next stop and take a local boat back to Ulyanovsk. The advice seemed to be both good and logical. Anyway, we had no other choice. That evening when the boat stopped at some harbor on the right bank of the Volga, we got off and situated ourselves in the waiting room where we decided to sleep on our bundles until the morning. "Morning is smarter than evening," according to a Russian proverb.

The next morning my uncle and I went reconnoitering into the town. What we saw could hardly be called even a little town. It was more like a large village. Nevertheless, it was the center of the local district and was called Pavlovo. It was located approximately 45 miles from Ulyanovsk in a very fertile region of the Volga steppes whose soil quality was second to that of Ukrainian soil. We went to the market place, bought two watermelons and returned to the harbor. In the waiting room a family "powwow" took place. Since both my aunt and my little cousin were totally exhausted by the trip, we decided to stop for 2-3 days at the local inn; the "Home of the Collective Farmer," rest and then either attempt to return to Ulyanovsk

and try our luck or to get settled in Pavlovo. We hired a wagon with a driver and transferred our belongings and our women to the "Home of the Collective Farmer."

Our room was located on the second floor. There were six beds with straw mattresses, straw pillows and blankets. So far we had no roommates. A chambermaid brought some wood and we started a fire in the oven. The day was October 5, 1941, and the weather started turning cold. My uncle and I went down to the restaurant located in the same building. It was much worse than the restaurant in Ivanovo. A damp long hall was crammed with tables covered with tattered oilcloth and lined with broken chairs. The dinner consisted of cucumber soup and lentils with a tablespoonful of sunflower oil. There was neither bread nor meat served because of war shortages. Ironically, only a few months before the industrial manager of the camp and the NKVD commandant told us that "the Soviet Union had enough grain to feed every citizen for 25 years." That was another one of the many propaganda lies the Russian people were fed for the past 24 years. We ordered dinner and since there were a few plates with vinaigrette salad and pickled mushrooms in the showcase on the counter, we took a plate with mushrooms as a snack. Pickled mushrooms are a Russian delicacy. They are prepared by pickling the mushrooms in wooden barrels, the way one would make sauerkraut or pickles, with a special fungus that grows on tree trunks. These mushrooms are so salty that one gets thirsty almost from just looking at them. Even though we took only one portion we drank water all day and all night.

The next morning my uncle and I went to the local tractor yard hoping that there would be a job for my uncle, a mechanical engineer by profession, who could easily work as a machinist or a turner in the shop. The manager was very pleasant and had a job not only for my uncle but also for me. Returning from the manager's office we discussed our situation: to chance traveling farther or to remain in Pavlovo through the winter. There was no question in our minds that traveling south at this time would entail numerous hardships, sickness, etc. On the other hand remaining in Pavlovo meant losing contact with the Polish milieu. Our camp experiences had provided us with a rather poor opinion about our compatriots: gossip, denunciations, provocations and similar "dirt" were par for the course. On the other hand to remain in this little village and be the only Polish family about whose existence neither the Polish Embassy nor even the regional NKVD knew, did not seem to be the right thing to do either. What if there were some official changes in the status of the Poles in the Soviet Union? Who would know about us? The two of us wandered around this little town with muddy streets, with statues of Stalin and Lenin in the center of a little park, with the whitewashed two-storied buildings of the NKVD (small jail next to them, of course!), the Raispolkom and the Raikom next to the NKVD buildings. We were stopped by a Pole who disembarked with a sick child in Pavlovo on his way south. He planned to resume his journey as soon as the child got well. Because he was an architect by profession, he did not anticipate any difficulty in getting a job. We decided we would continue our trip south and, having reached this decision, returned to our room in the "Home of the Collective Farmer."

Imagine our surprise to find two visitors there whom my aunt valiantly entertained with lively conversation. They turned out to be evacuees who with their families lived on a fishing collective farm nearby. Since both hailed from Kiev, they considered us, Poles, to be next door neighbors (just across the old border!) and because they were also staying at the "Home of the Collective Farmer," they decided to visit us. "The next door neighbors" gave us some of the most valuable and unusual advice as we were embarking on our new way of life. "You had better get used to the fact that no matter where you work you must steal. Here in the Soviet Union, whoever does not steal has nothing and starves. You won't make a living working honestly." Or "When there is something available in the store, you buy it whether you need it or not because later it will not be available. In my trunk I have five pairs of men's galoshes but none fits me. Nevertheless I have them because when they (meaning the authorities) give something you just take it and don't ask questions." Both men advised us to go south to Tashkent. "Tashkent is 'the bread city'." they said in unison. We decided to move on in 2-3 days and went to sleep.

At night an event took place which totally confounded our plans and possibly completely changed our lives. It started entirely innocently. In the evening a tall skinny Russian moved into our room and immediately went to sleep on one of the empty beds. At midnight our roommate got terrible abdominal cramps and was twisting in pain on his bed like an earthworm. My aunt, a light sleeper but otherwise a very good-natured and understanding woman (how can one remain indifferent to human suffering?!) found some stomach drops at the bottom of one of the suitcases and gave them to the man. After a half-

hour the cramps stopped and, since we were wide awake by that time anyway, we started talking. It turned out that our roommate was an evacuee from the Estonian border. His name was Fish and he lived with his wife and a small son on the "Red Star Collective Farm" located approximately 15 miles from Pavlovo. He worked as a bookkeeper in the Selpo; *i.e.* an organization based on peasant membership. The organization's activity encompassed several villages within a given radius. Its members paid regular dues and were issued membership cards. The Selpo had a store in every member village and when any goods arrived at the store (a rare occasion, to be sure!), they were first sold to members in good standing and then to other mortals. According to Fish's description, life on the "Red Star Collective Farm could be compared only to that in paradise." This year the harvest is unusually good." Fish told us. "There are so few people to harvest the crops that the cattle, sheep and horses graze in the wheat and millet fields. As soon as you come you will be given provisions and assigned living quarters, firewood and work. There is even a tractor yard with a shop. The few families evacuated from the war zone are treated with great respect and so will be you, the only Polish family." We fell asleep almost at dawn.

When we woke up, Fish was gone. He went to take care of his business. We had another family "powwow" to consider our situation and all the "pros" and "cons" of getting settled for the winter in the "Red Star Collective Farm." We counted our money, sized up our belongings, clothes, provisions, etc. By the time Fish returned in the afternoon to say goodbye and to thank us again for relieving his suffering the previous night, we decided in favor of moving to the "Red Star." Fish promised to mention us to the chairman of the collective farm and to the director of the tractor yard and shop, and to have a wagon come for us. In the meantime my uncle and I went to the Raispolkom to obtain an official assignment to the "Red Star Collective Farm." The Raispolkom secretary was most cordial, immediately phoned the collective farm and requested that a wagon be sent for us. We returned to the "Home of the Collective Farmer," packed our bedding and waited for the wagon.

Late that evening an eleven-year old Russian boy wearing sheepskin fur coat and a cap with earmuffs rushed into our room with the announcement: "Uncle! (a form used by Russian children when addressing adult strangers; uncle and aunt, or grandpa and grandma if the adults are old). I am from the collective farm and came to pick you up." "We won't go with you at night." my uncle said. "Let them send an adult." It was risky to travel with a boy at night. What if something happened to the horses or we were attacked by wolves? The boy left and the next morning the chairman of the collective farm showed up in our room asking why we did not come. He was a 28-year old man, understood our concerns and promised to send a wagon the next day. At noon the next day a two-horse cart with sides made of two ladders and filled with hay pulled up in front of the "Home of the Collective Farmer." After feeding the horses which took about three hours, we loaded our belongings onto the wagon and were on our way to our next adventure. It was already dark when we arrived in a village about 10 miles from Pavlovo. Our driver pulled up to a friend's cabin where we spent the night sleeping on the floor. We had another six miles to go. The next day the weather became terrible: wet snow and strong winds. Around noon we arrived at the tractor shop administration office looking like snowmen and frozen to the bones. The director, a middle-aged man, greeted us without any particular enthusiasm, called in the physical plant manager and the two of them discussed possible lodgings for us. Finally they reached a decision and fetched our future landlady, a tall almost 80-yearold woman. She lived alone and was only too happy to take in a family with two men who would take it upon themselves to ensure the supply of firewood. And so just to have firewood and for no other additional compensation grandma agreed to take us in. We drove up to her cabin which was located in the center of the village. It wasn't big, was made out of wood and was neglected. Of course! No men!

We went inside the cabin and started getting settled. The chamber was small. In the corner across from the door hung a huge icon with various saints. "A whole collective of saints." my uncle remarked as soon as he noticed the icon. Under one wall and next to the door stood a wooden bed which was to be for my aunt and uncle. At the opposite wall and under a window we placed our iron bed for me. My head was under the icon and during the first week I hit my head against the icon's frame every time I got up from my bed. Later on when I got used to my sleeping location those rude awakenings in the morning ceased. Under the third wall stood a wooden bench, with a wooden table in front of it and then another wooden bench. For the night we placed the two benches next to each other and they served as my cousin Kathy's bed. A huge Russian oven and a *gollandka* (from "Gollandia," Holland in Russian) *i.e.* a stove for heating water formed the fourth wall of the chamber. Between the Russian oven and the *gollandka* was the

entrance to the *chulan*; i.e. a closet where the buckets for water and for hogwash, a broken cupboard with broken pots and plates, and an *umyvalnik*, a contraption for washing up and fashioned out of a tea kettle hung by its handle were kept. There was also the opening to the Russian oven, the utensils for manipulating the pots in the oven and an old samovar. In other words that was the domain of the "lady of the house." Grandma slept on the very top of the Russian oven where it was warm.

When it got dark we lit our kerosene lamp with the glass chimney which we had so carefully guarded from the moment we had left the camp. Grandma was in seventh heaven! Poor thing used to sit in the dark because she had no kerosene even for a *koptilka*, a kerosene lamp without the glass chimney. We bought a bucketful of potatoes from grandma, started fire in the oven and after supper went to sleep. The next day by noontime we finished unpacking our bundles. Only then did we notice that the walls of the chamber were plastered with newspapers. "Well, I'll be able to practice reading in Russian." I thought to myself. There was another important problem to be solved, namely a place for satisfying one's basic physiological needs. With grandma's permission I dug a hole in the stable. "There was a horse here before collectivization." Grandma said with a sad smile "Now it will come handy for people."

In the afternoon my uncle and I went to the director of the tractor yard and shop. Right away he appointed my uncle the kerosene warehouse manager and promised to send a load of firewood next day. Then we went to the administration office of the collective farm. The chairman happened to be there so we were able to discuss my place of work and remuneration. I was assigned to the animal farm. Every ten days I would receive a voucher for 17.5 pounds of flour, 9 pounds of millet groats, 9 pounds of peas and 17.5 pounds of potatoes as my pay. No vouchers for milk or fats were given out because those products were available only in minimal quantities. I was supposed to report to work in two days.

In the meantime I walked around the village and familiarized myself with its layout. The village was large with two main streets and a number of side streets. Many houses were built either of fired brick or unfired brick. In the middle of the village was a square with the ruins of a church. The former rectory now housed a school. The bricks from the church were used to put up the tractor shop 500 meters outside of the village proper. The inhabitants were not wealthy peasants and were not exiled during the 1929-1931 collectivization drive when the rich peasants, the *kulaks*, were sent into remote areas of the country and everything they owned was confiscated. The peasants were hostile toward the collective farm and worked inefficiently. It was then no wonder that since the beginning of the "Red Star's" existence the farmers had not earned a single gram of grain, and whatever they were given was "on account" so that they could subsist, but only by increasing their debt to the collective farm. Some of them owed tons of grain.

As promised, the next day a load of firewood was delivered to the cabin. My uncle and I sawed and chopped it, and stacked it in a neat pile. On October 11, 1941, I started working in the animal farm.

The Collective Farmer's Life Is Not A Happy One! (To paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan.)

The animal farm occupied several farm buildings on one side of the village. One part of it consisted of two large cow barns for both cows and sheep, two stables and a corral for letting the animals out to get some fresh air. In the other part of the animal farm there was a smaller corral and pig pens. Somewhat to the side was a small cabin with a stove for the night watchman and where one animal farm worker stayed during the day. All of the buildings were neglected, full of holes and generally in ruins. The cabin was filthy inside and it was nauseating to stay there. The manager of the animal farm was Peter Alexandrovich or *Uncle Petya* as everyone called him, a short, stocky man about sixty years old with a brown mustache under a bulbous red nose. He was also bowlegged and waddled like a duck. Uncle Petya, like the majority of Russian peasants, was a truly good-natured individual, who represented what is referred to as "*Russkaya dusha*" (Russian soul, Russian good heartedness). Uncle Petya's assistants were two women: big and heavy *Aunt Lonia*, who reminded me of a particular wardrobe in my parents' apartment, and *Aunt Pasha*, a small woman with a red face and baby-blue eyes. There was also a horse named *Kolkhoznik*, ("The Collective Farmer"), an old and mean beast, who always looked for an opportunity either to kick or to bite someone. "He is cross because he has to work on the collective farm. He still remembers the good, old times when we were our own bosses." Uncle Petya justified the horse's behavior. So I became Uncle Petya's fourth assistant, the horse being the third one after the two women.

In the beginning my job was to ride with Uncle Petya into the fields where we loaded our wagon with millet which was left behind after harvesting or which dropped from wagons on the way to the thrashing machine and brought it to the animal farm to feed the animals. Our roommate in the "Home of the Collective Farmer," Fish, did not exaggerate when he told us that grain was being fed to animals on the collective farm. Since there were now two men on the animal farm, we were assigned a second horse with a wagon. The horse, an old limping mare with bad hind legs, was called *Tatarka*. She looked very funny with her matted mane and tail which were full of burrs. "Tatarka" was a hard working animal but she tired easily and when cross would bite anything or anyone within her reach. During my trips into the fields with Uncle Petya to bring millet straw or rotting wheat for the pigs, I learned about my coworkers. Aunt Lonia was a widow with three daughters. The oldest was sixteen and worked as a tractor driver. The two younger ones were still in school. Aunt Pasha was also a widow and had two sons. The older one was sent to a trade school where he worked 10-12 hours a day and was underfed and housed in an unheated dormitory, so that he could never get enough sleep. The younger son worked on the collective farm. Uncle Petya himself was a widower and lived in a brick house with his old mother, a spinster daughter and a son, Ted, who had a bad heart.

One day it was raining cats and dogs, so Uncle Petya told me to go to the stable and clean out the manure because winter was approaching, the sheep would start bearing their offspring and the newborn lambs would freeze to death in the cow barn. I took a pitchfork and went into the stable. Inside I found a 16-year old young man, dressed decently who greeted me very politely. We started talking and I immediately noticed that he did not use coarse language, formed sentences correctly and used words which led me to believe that he had had a primary education. His name was *Fimka*, and he lived with his widowed mother and a younger sister. The mother worked as cleaning woman in the village dispensary and six-bed hospital. His sister had dropped out of school in order to earn a living and was the village mail carrier. We worked together all day and, of course, Fimka was most interested in learning about what life was like in Poland. He immediately asked whether or not we had collective farms in Poland.

Many days passed monotonously on the animal farm filled with cleaning manure, and with feeding and watering the animals. When Uncle Petya went for lunch, I would stretch out on a bench, rest and think about how unpredictable life was. Three years had not yet passed since I had become a medical student at the University of Warsaw. What would happen in the next three years? Would they turn out to be better or worse? Would the war end or not? Would we be back in Poland or still in the Soviet Union? I used to return home from work when it got dark. After bringing two buckets of water from the well I ate dinner: potato soup and sometimes millet grits or peas. Occasionally the menu changed: in place of potato soup were potatoes with peas or potatoes with millet grits. My aunt was the cook, the baker and the laundress. Baking bread was her Waterloo! Although our landlady showed her and helped many times, mixing the dough required a lot of strength which my aunt just lacked. When the Russian oven was hot and the firewood burnt out, the dough was shaped into loaves, the loaves were placed in the oven

and the flue shut. Then the room would fill with carbon monoxide which caused unbearable headache. So after each "Bread Baking Day" my aunt was sick. During the first weeks of cooking she also used to burn her hands and get her face all sooty just from manipulating the cooking pots and pot handling utensils in the oven.

Shortly after we settled into a routine, my aunt struck up her first acquaintance. Next to our cabin was the village library and one day Marion, the librarian, stopped by to borrow matches for the kerosene lamp in the library. She stayed for an hour and promised to help my aunt with her bread baking chores. One day I went to the library to borrow some books. The library holdings did not offer much choice; mostly propaganda literature, speeches delivered by Lenin and Stalin for various occasions and popular agricultural pamphlets. Fiction was represented by writers such as *Wasilewska* and *Ostrovsky*, whose "How Steel Was Tempered" had been acknowledged by the authorities as the most important literary work of the fighting Bolshevism. In Bolshevik poetry *Mayakovsky* was the equivalent of *Ostrovsky*. There were also a few badly worn out books for children. Sometimes we spent our evenings reading books or newspapers borrowed from Marion, who frequently came by to help bake bread or to scrub the floor. My aunt gave her a pair of slightly darned stockings and Marion was ecstatic about the gift. By far the most important things we did in the evening was writing letters. We wrote to Joe, the Dentist, in the settlement and to my aunt's sister in Moscow. Their addresses were known to our friends and acquaintances with whom we wanted to keep in touch. I sent a letter with my new address to my relatives in the U.S. and another one to the General Staff of the Polish Army located in *Yanghi Yul* somewhere in southern Russia. In that letter I asked whether or not two persons had reported for duty: Dr. A. Wertheim, my father's chief in a Warsaw hospital, and Aleksander, one of my father's younger brothers, an internist and a reserve officer. In the 1939 Campaign, he had been taken prisoner by the Red Army and we received two letters from him addressed to us in Lwow and posted from a prisoner of war camp in Starobielsk on April 10, 1940. I received the answer that neither officer had reported for duty. A few days later another letter arrived with additional information that "officers, former prisoners of war, from camps in *Srarobielsk*, *Kozielsk* and *Ostashkov*, are in the Far North (on *Novaya Zemlya*) and will return in July and August 1942 when traveling from that region becomes possible." It turned out later that Dr. Wertheim was never in the territory of the Soviet Union, but remained in the Warsaw Ghetto, and many officers never reported to serve with the Polish Army in U.S.S.R. Having been brutally murdered in the *Katyn Forest* near *Smolensk* and in other "Katyns," or drowned in the Arctic Ocean by artillery fire directed at barges taking them to *Novaya Zemlya*. Those people took with them to their mass graves in the Katyn Forest and in other numerous "Katyns," and to the bottom of the Arctic Ocean the secret and agony of their martyrdom.

The first letters mailed to our new address were brought to our cabin personally by *Shura*, the wife of the village postmaster, Ted. Shura and Ted were a very nice young couple. He was not drafted because of an underdeveloped right wrist and at this time his disability was, undoubtedly, most welcome since no able men were left in the village and many families received notices about their loved ones being wounded, killed or missing in action. Bringing the letters gave Shura an opportunity to ask if we had anything for sale. We did: a black material for the lining of a suit. The material had come in one of the American packages and was to be used with some black cloth suitable for a suit. We had sold the material before leaving the camp. The next day Shura bought the material for two pounds of rendered butter valued at 70 *rubles* per pound and 67 two-liter containers of milk at 1 *ruble* per liter. The transaction amounted to 204 rubles and we were assured of milk for 2.5 months. We also bought several *pud* of potatoes (1 *pud* = 36 pounds).

Another acquaintance was the daughter-in-law of our landlady. Her husband had been killed in action and she was left with two boys: one nine-year old and the other one a few month old baby. As a widow of a soldier killed in action, she received 25 *rubles* monthly for each child. Sometimes my uncle's colleague from the tractor shop, a bookkeeper, would come for a visit. She was a good looking 25-year old woman with four small children. Her husband, a party member, was in the army as a second *lieitenan-politruk*; i.e. political officer. According to Uncle Petya, he was a mean character, an informer and a schemer, who always managed to get out of being sent to the front. "Our children are dying at the front," Uncle Petya used to rage. "And such a party bastard is hiding in the rear instead of serving as an example in the front lines!"

The German Army was already in the suburbs of Moscow. The embassies and legations of foreign

countries, as well as the most important government offices, had been moved to *Kuibyshev*. There was the danger that the Germans would break through the Soviet front and reach the Volga. In the Kuibyshev province, as well as in the neighboring provinces and republics. Adolescent boys and girls, women, old men, horses and wagons were drafted to build a defense line, consisting of trenches and antitank defenses. Every village and every hamlet knew the word "*Popovka*," the name of the small town in which the headquarters for the construction of defense lines were located. Day and night, in blinding snow and in penetrating wind masses of people and horses moved through our village, cursing and crying. People walked and hoped for the Germans to come. They actually waited for the enemy as their salvation and cursed the Soviet government and its leaders. It was most depressing. All of the adolescent boys and girls, and all of the horses were taken away from our collective farm. Only children, old people and sick horses remained. Fimka, whom I had met on the animal farm, was also drafted. Winter was rapidly approaching. The tractor shop administration acquired a small parcel in the forest so that its workers could have firewood for the winter and one Sunday I went with my uncle and other workers from the tractor shop to cut the trees, saw the timber and put it up into cords. The forest was approximately four miles from our village. We returned late in the evening totally exhausted but nevertheless very happy because a supply of firewood was stacked in the forest for the winter months.

My uncle was assigned the additional job of an instructor in the tractor shop. Every year a three-month training program was presented for 15-17 year old boys and girls so that they could learn to work on tractors. Immediately the new instructor became a very popular person because in addition to interesting lectures in arithmetic and in the mechanics of the internal combustion engine, he was able to hold the attention of his students with various stories and could also draw. Drawing was my uncle's passion. His sketchbook contained very nice watercolors and sketches from the camp. Now he enriched his sketchbook with very good portraits of tractor operators and the militiaman stationed in our village. His portrait sketching took place during the lunch hours when the tractor operators gathered around the oven, tossed potatoes into the hot ashes and waited for the baked potatoes to be ready. While working at the tractor shop my uncle met many interesting types. The shop manager, *Vasily Ivanovich*, used to be the senior mechanic before advancing to his present position. He was a stout, red-faced man, semi-illiterate but a member of the party. It was this membership in the party that propelled him into the managerial position. Furthermore, his cousin was the chairman of the *Raispolkom* which certainly helped. The manager was a widower and his household was run by his mother, a little old lady, who was always drunk and smoked a pipe. The senior mechanic, *Arkadii Pavlovich*, a tall good-looking Russian, was the terror of all of the tractor operators. He was very demanding, liked order and appreciated work which was well done. He took an immediate liking to my uncle and became his best friend. The two of them used to spend long hours discussing various topics. The senior mechanic was a self-educated individual but very sharp, intelligent and well-read. He was a storehouse of both professional and general knowledge. One Sunday he came for a visit. We talked about books, poetry and literature, discussed Russian writers and then switched to Polish ones. Arkadii Pavlovich had such an extensive knowledge of *Sienkiewicz's* "Trilogy," *Reymont's* "Peasants," *Prus's* "Doll" and of a number of other Polish literary works that he would have put many Polish high school graduates to shame. Then the conversation turned to political subjects. My uncle talked about the Industrial Leipzig Fair in 1937 which he attended as a representative of the company for which he worked, when our visitor turned to him and said: "Roman Stepanovich! Explain to me, please, what 'fascist' means." We were surprised by this totally unexpected request and my uncle explained to him the meaning of that word. Arkadii was very grateful and said after a while: "You see, in 1936 during the Trotskyite purge trials, I was imprisoned for over two years. At that time I was accused of being a fascist and I even did not know what it meant. Only now have I learned the meaning of that word. Thank you so much." Arkadii Pavlovich had painful memories from *Uncle Ivan* that period of time in his life as well as frostbitten hands and feet.

There were two night watchmen in the tractor shop. One of them, *Uncle Ivan*, had served in a Russian army unit which fought on the French-German front in World War I and then returned to Russia through Salonika in Greece. Uncle Ivan liked to tell people that he had served in the "*vit (huit) compagnie*." Every morning when my uncle arrived at work, bearded Uncle Ivan in his bast shoes and with a big clay pipe in his mouth greeted my uncle with a "*bon jour, monsieur*." There was something incongruous, even tragic and yet amusing in that greeting in French said on a dark winter morning in 1941 in a village somewhere in the vastness of the Soviet Union.

While working on the animal farm I also met many people. Frequently, the foremen who were in charge of the various teams of collective farmers used to come by for a chat. There was 75-year old *Uncle Petya*, foreman of Team No. 1, one-eyed *Uncle Stepan*, foreman of Team No. 2, who had served in the Russian army somewhere near *Vilno*, and hunch-backed *Fedka*. We used to sit in the night watchman's little room, smoke cigarettes rolled in newspaper and shoot the breeze. From those conversations I learned quite a lot about our collective farm. The area of its fields and meadows was 30,220 acres, but not all of it was cultivated because of a shortage of workers, draft animals, etc. It was not unusual for a large part of the harvest to be left in the fields where it rotted away under the autumn rains, or remained unmoved under the snow only to be burned in the spring when the fields had to be readied for plowing and sowing.

The number of head of cattle, sheep, horses and pigs was determined by the cultivated area. Taxes which were collected by the state in the form of grain, meat, eggs, honey, wool and hay also depended upon the area under cultivation, although the actual amounts could vary slightly depending on whether the harvest was good or bad. The farmers received what was left after all of the taxes and fees had been paid. As soon as the harvesting and thrashing began, the teams transporting the grain to the grain elevators as payment for state taxes became active. When the state's tax requirement was satisfied, grains representing payments for the use of tractors and donation to the Red Army Fund, etc. were delivered. When all of those obligations were met, the seed for spring sowing was put into the warehouse. The amount of this seed was based on an assumption of approximately 90 pounds of seed for one acre of area. Only then did the remaining grains belong to the collective farm. Usually 50% of the remaining grain was distributed to the farmers and the other 50% was left for "rainy days," i.e. for the spring.

Accounts were settled once a year, after the 1st of February. A farmer's work was evaluated in terms of "work day" units. Depending on the type and amount of work, the farmer could earn a given number of "work day" units in a day's work. When the annual accounting was prepared, the amount of grain remaining for the collective farm was divided by the total number of "work day" units earned by all the members of the collective. This way each farmer's daily earnings were calculated in terms of "grain equivalents." Since during the year a farmer and his family had to eat, they were given some grain "on account." This amount of grain was deducted from the final earnings at the final accounting. For example, if after the grain was delivered to the government elevators, the collective farm could distribute 15% of delivered grain, then instead 7.5% was distributed to the farmers and the remaining 7.5% was kept in reserve for the various needs of the collective, as well as for feed for the horses.

A more detailed example may help to illustrate this complicated accounting system. If after delivering the required amount of grain to the government grain elevator, 8000 kg remained in the collective farm, then 4000 kg was kept for "rainy days" and the remaining 4000 kg was distributed among the farmers. If all of the workers earned 40,000 "work day" units that year, then each "work day" unit equaled 0.1 kg or 100 grams of grain. If Ivan earned 520 "work day" units that year, he got 52 kg of grain. Since he was given 20 kg "on account," the collective farm owed him only 32 kg. If he took more "on account" than his annual earnings, he became a debtor of the collective. The "Red Star," the collective farm where we lived and where I worked, had not filled its government obligations since the beginning of its existence, so its debt to the government increased every year as did the debt of each individual member of the collective with respect to the collective. Arkadii Pavlovich once explained to us that all of the collective farms in this area were malingering because most of the people, who consisted primarily of wealthy peasants (so called *kulaks*), were bitterly opposed to collectivization.

The chairman of a collective farm and the foremen were held responsible for the inefficiency of their collectives. They could be removed from their posts and imprisoned. That fall when we came to live on the "Red Star" several thousands kilograms of wheat rotted in barns and in the fields. Consequently, in the middle of December the chairman was removed from his post and his military deferment was taken away from him so that instead of being tried in court, he was sent to the front. Several weeks later his family was notified that he had been killed in action. During the war the Soviet authorities had alternative solutions to court trials for their citizens. They were sent to the front lines so that at least before his death a citizen could kill a few Germans. The council of the collective farm "elected" a new chairman, *Ivan Petrovich*, who had been nominated by the *Raispolkom*. The new chairman, who was the son of the

foreman, Uncle Petya, and a very nice, as well as honest individual, could not do much at the "Red Star" collective farm either.

The Russian winter was in full swing and several women were assigned to the animal farm as additional workers. They looked after the cows, sheep and pigs, cleaned out the manure and distributed the feed. They were all young women whose husbands were in the army or dead. A few men were assigned to cart the straw from the fields to the animal farm. They were very interesting types usually one encounters only in the Russian literature or films. The oldest was *Yegor Antonovich*, a 70-year old tall stooped peasant with a big red beard and long red hair which covered his neck. Yegor Antonovich did not smoke tobacco but used snuff which he carried in a small glass bottle. He would empty a quarter of that bottle on the palm of his hand, rub the tobacco with a dirty finger and draw the powder into his red beak-like nose. Consequently, his mustache, beard and the tip of his nose were always gray from the snuff. Antonovich tried to persuade me to use snuff instead of smoking cigarettes because it did not harm one's lungs. I tried it once and sneezed for half-a-day. I was sure I would die and continue sneezing after my death. He used to say that if it were the "old times" and not the collective farm, he would not have to work but could lay on the Russian stove and wait for death to come. But he had to work in his old age and could hardly earn enough for himself and his wife.

The second worker was *Sergey Tikhonovich*, a handsome, well-built peasant who was about 50 years old. In the summertime he worked as a shepherd but during the winter he hauled hay from the haystacks in the fields to the animal farm. His 13-year old son, *Shurka*, worked with him. Whenever Shurka came from the fields all frozen and snow covered, he reminded me of the little peasant boy in the poem "*Muzhichok s nagatok*" by the Russian poet Nekrasov. (*Odnazhdy v studennuyu zimnyuyu poru ya iz lesu vyshol. Byl silnyi moroz/ Glyazhu, podnimayetsyamedlenno v goru loshadka vyezushchaya hvorostu voz, ... etc.*). Shurka's sister also worked on the animal farm and the three of them supported a paralyzed wife and mother. They were probably one of the poorest families in the village, but Shurka was always cheerful. He yelled at his horse in a deep voice, and upon entering the night watchman's cabin to warm up always rolled two long cigarettes: one for himself and one for me, and then proceeded to smoke spitting from time to time straight into one of the corners. His father always reminisced about the "old times" when he worked as a forester for Count Orlov, the owner of the village, and how he, Tikhonovich, used to accompany the Count on hunts. The fourth worker was Paul, a middle-aged peasant who was an epileptic. We always hoped that he would not have a seizure at work.

Sometimes I would ride with the other farmers for hay. Uncle Petya would send me when one of them did not show up for work and a horse was available. Loading the hay on the sleds was not an easy task. We rode approximately 3 km (1.6 miles) from the animal farm into a field where the haystacks were standing. Two men climbed on the haystack and pulled the hay with their pitchforks. It was hard work because the hay, which had been stacked since the summer was pressed down and it took a lot of effort to pull it out. The third man stood on the sled and laid down the hay handed to him from the haystack. Loading the sled evenly required certain know-how, because if it was not loaded evenly the sled would constantly turn over on the way back. When that happened, the hay had to be taken off of the sled and the sled reloaded. Even during the most severe cold this work would result in becoming wet from perspiration.

On the way back from the fields the weather frequently consisted of a freezing wind blown snow. I laid down on top of the hay to expose as little as possible of my body to the elements. The Russians wore heavy long sheepskin coats called *tulups* over cotton-padded pants and jackets which kept them warm. My clothes were totally unsuitable for this weather. I could feel my shirt turning into an ice shell and when we returned to the animal farm my teeth were chattering like an automatic pistol. I had left my "padded uniform" in the camp since we were to go to Ulyanovsk. It was unlikely that anyone in a city would wear a "prison camp uniform."

In the middle of December we became excited about Gen. Sikorski's visit to the Kremlin. We read the text of the speech he delivered over the radio in the newspaper. Unfortunately we did not hear it because: (1) there was no radio in the village as all equipment was confiscated at the beginning of the war and (2) none of the newspapers printed any radio programs which really did not matter because the paper was delivered late anyway. What did matter was that the Polish Government in London knew about

us, Polish exiles in the Soviet Union, and that after the war we would return to Poland. Ten days later we had further proof that our existence was known not only to the Polish Government but also to the regional authorities. At noon on December 24, 1941, the manager of the tractor shop sent a messenger to fetch me from the animal farm and bring me to his office immediately. In about 5 minutes I entered his office scared out of my wits. My fear was compounded by the fact that my uncle was already there and I anticipated some "political" trouble. When my uncle winked at me merrily, I understood that nothing disastrous was in the offing. The manager asked me to sit down and delivered the following speech: "Tonight, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow are your Christmas Holidays. Therefore, you can go home now and don't show up for work for two days. I wish you Merry Christmas!" I was speechless. We went to the animal farm to inform my boss. Uncle Petya was no less surprised than I was. "Well"-he said shaking his head-"Go and celebrate. They won't even say 'Thank you' for our work." We went home.

An old woman was waiting for our arrival with a business proposition. She had a *banya* (a small Russian log bathhouse) which she wanted us to dismantle so that she would have firewood for the winter. We went with the woman to look at her banya. It was a small cabin about 9 ft by 9 ft at the base and maybe 5-6 ft high put together with interlocking wooden logs. We settled with the woman that we would dismantle the banya and cart the logs to her place the next day for the price of 100 kg of potatoes and 2 kg of mutton. And so on Christmas Day 1941 we did the job, were paid for it and had potato soup with some mutton for supper.

Before the holidays we received a lot of letters and we devoted our Christmas break to answering the mail. The letters were both interesting and important. One was from Joe, the Dentist. He had moved with his family to the little town on the Volga where in 1940 we had been taken off the train and transferred to the boat, and practiced dentistry there. Another letter was from engineer Berger who was in Kuibyshev and used the Polish Embassy's return address. He wrote that he could not get established in the regional town and had decided to move south with his family. They boarded the last boat going down the Volga but only reached the town of *Stavropol*, within 100 km from Kuibyshev, where the boat got stuck in ice. All of the passengers left the boat and the Polish Embassy took care of the Polish nationals by busing them to Kuibyshev. The Kuibyshev municipal government gave the Embassy a small building, which used to house a school, and the Embassy converted it into a dormitory for those passengers and any other Poles who showed up at the Embassy. Engineer Berger wrote that the sanitary conditions were deplorable and the interpersonal relationships among the people very unpleasant, but materially they were OK because the Embassy clothed and fed them. He urged my uncle to come to Kuibyshev where he would undoubtedly get a job in the Embassy because they were short of people. Neither my uncle nor I could muster enough courage for the 140 km trip on foot during the winter and so we remained in the "Red Star" collective farm.

Another letter arrived from two friends of my aunt and uncle, one an electrical engineer and the other one a well-known lawyer in Warsaw. They had established themselves near *Ufa*, the capital of the *Bashkir* Republic, where they worked at sawing wood for the local military mess hall. The advantages of their job were twofold: they could take some firewood with them at the end of their workday and in addition to being paid they also had a free dinner. Two letters arrived from Polish Army units in *Dzhalal-Abad*. One was from Lou, who had lived in our barracks with the two brothers Jay and Jim ("The Beetles"). He was serving as an officer in the transport unit. The other letter was from our dear friend Iggi, who served as an infantry officer. He had been exiled to *Tomsk*, a city in Siberia, and worked there in a sawmill.

One letter was definitely the most interesting. It came from our old settlement from Mrs. Koch, who had denounced us to the NKVD commandant as having mocked Stalin and being enemies of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet system. She explained in her letter that it was a misunderstanding and begged us to rehabilitate her because the trustee of the Polish Embassy categorically refused to give her or her family any food or clothing. Needless to say, this letter remained unanswered.

All of the evacuees, including us ushered in the New Year of 1942 by being able to buy a kilogram of beef sausage, one bar of soap, 200 grams of hard candy and 200 grams of sugar in the store. Shortly after New Year's Day I decided to drive to the forest for some firewood because our supply was rapidly dwindling. The previous day I had asked Uncle Petya for permission to borrow a horse and a sled. He

consented without the slightest hesitation, so that evening I took "The Collective Farmer" and a sled home and put him up in our stable for the night. The next day I got up at dawn, ate some of the soup left over from the previous evening and hitched the horse. When it got light at about 8:30 I left home. The weather was just terrible. The snow was blinding and the wind was bone-chilling. When I got out of the village and onto the road toward the forest, the weather worsened. The snow became thicker, it got dark and it was impossible to see the forest which was just 6 km (less than 4 miles) from the village. Initially I tried to direct the horse with the reins but only got him off of the road and into snow up to his belly. Fortunately, "The Collective Farmer" did not lay down in the snow as many horses would do forcing the driver to unhitch them in the bitter cold, but jumping like a hare he got back on the road and slowly stepped straight ahead.

Initially I thought about turning around and driving back to the village but gave up that idea, because by executing that maneuver I could have driven the horse into a roadside trench full of snow. So I decided to leave "The Collective Farmer" to his horse sense, sat quietly on the sled and from time to time cleaned the snow off of my glasses and from behind my collar. After a two-hour trip the horse stopped. Only then did I notice through the falling snow that we were on the edge of the forest. I found the cords of wood prepared for the tractor shop and pulled up to them. In the forest I did not feel any wind but the snow was still coming down. I got off the sled, rolled a long cigarette and started to smoke with pleasure. Only then did I start relaxing and realizing that this whole trip could have ended in a disaster. Getting lost in a snowstorm, freezing to death, being buried by snow and not being discovered until the thaw did not sound pleasant at all. Only "The Collective Farmer's" horse sense got me to the forest and now I knew that I would not have to worry about not being able to find the way back to the village. I looked with tenderness at the horse. He stood quietly chewing the collective farm's rotten hay. At that moment I forgave him all his quirks, and the fact that he liked to kick and to bite, and that he refused to run even without any load. I took the piece of bread that I had brought for myself and had kept inside my jacket and gave it to the horse. Poor nag! If he could only talk, he would probably tell me a lot about the good life with his previous master, when he ate oats and not rotten hay and when he had occupied a clean warm stable.

When the cigarette was finished and I felt rested, I started loading the sled. I selected dry pieces in order to take the most wood. By the same token I had to watch that the sled did not get too heavy because the road was buried under the snow. In a half-hour the sled was loaded, and I started back to the village. Although the snow was still coming down like feathers from a torn pillow, the wind had calmed down. I did not sit on the sled to make it lighter for the horse. As it was, the poor beast walked slowly in the foot-deep snow. After two hours we returned to the village. My pants and jacket were covered with a thick layer of wet snow, which penetrated not only my outer clothing but also my underwear as it melted. My aunt was waiting at the window worried that something had happened to me. I unloaded the wood behind our cabin, returned the horse and the sled to the animal farm, and only after retuning home did I take off my wraps for drying and put on pajamas. In spite of having been wet and cold, nothing happened to me; not even a case of the sniffles. We found it truly amazing how the human organism can develop resistance and adapt to adverse conditions.

My work at the animal farm became pretty much a routine. In addition to helping the women distribute hay to the animals and clean the manure, my main job was hauling water and watering the animals. At approximately 1 p.m. I hitched the horse to a sled with a barrel open at the top, took a pail and drove to the pond. I pulled up to a hole in the ice and, using the pail, filled the barrel with 20 pails of water. Then I drove back to the animal farm and, again using the pail, transferred the water from the barrel to a trough. Usually it took 3-4 barrels of water to satisfy the needs of the animals. By that time I looked like Saint Nick. My jacket, felt boots and gloves, which had become wet during the water transferring operations, were now covered with ice. One day it was decided to place a large trough at the hole in the ice and bring the cows and the sheep to it for watering. This arrangement would also provide the animals with some exercise. So I changed from a water hauler to a shepherd. Every day at noontime I grabbed a stick while one of the women took a pail and a stick. We would open the gate of the cow shed and let the cows out. Then we marched behind them yelling loudly and swinging our sticks. The cows used to spread out in all directions, but the most trouble we had was with the bull who tried to brake down the gates to all of the enclosures whenever he sensed that a cow was inside. After each "watering trip" I used to return as tired as if I did the most strenuous work.

The last wave of subzero weather started at the end of January. I remember well the beautiful view I saw when I left the cabin in the morning. It was still gray but in the east the sky was just turning pink. Then the pink color became more intense, changing into golden red and finally the red sun appeared on the horizon. The air was cold and still. Columns of gray smoke rose vertically from all of the chimneys. Here and there a gate would squeak and pails would clank. A woman, on her way for water, would carry two empty pails on a yoke placed over her shoulders. The snow crunched under her felt boots. These scenes on cold winter mornings reminded me of the poems by the Russian poet *Nekrasov* in which he so vividly and beautifully described the Russian village in the winter.

In February the weather changed suddenly. While the days became somewhat warmer, violent blizzards started and continued until the end of March. During one of those blizzards, when it was impossible to see anything even only 6 feet away, my uncle lost his way while returning from work and fell into a snow-filled trench. He could not get out and started yelling for help. Finally about ten minutes later a few passing tractor drivers helped him to get out. That happened on a Friday. On Saturday my uncle came down with a 102.2° fever. Obviously he had caught a cold. The blizzard continued for a second day, and I could barely get any water out of the well because it was so full of snow. I had to place a 16-pound (almost 8 kg) rock in the pail in order to break through the layer of ice and snow on the surface of the water in the well.

On Sunday an accident happened that shook up the whole region. Our village store was selling a half-pound of hard candy to each member of the cooperative. A physician's assistant, who lived in a village 9 km (approx. 5.5 miles) distant from ours, hitched a ride with someone to our village that Sunday morning in order to get the candy. Because she had to be in the dispensary next morning and had no ride back, she decided to walk. It turned out that the next day the physician's assistant did not show up for work in the dispensary. Since she had left our village a search party was immediately organized. Halfway between the two villages the searchers found the girl's frozen body covered with snow. In the pocket of her coat she had the half-pound of hard candy for which she died at the age of 22 years.

In the meantime we had our problems. My uncle's fever did not decrease, and I suspected pneumonia. Consequently, I send a note to the physician's assistant who lived about 2 km (a little over a mile) from our village in a *sovchoz* or state farm asking him to come and examine my uncle. He arrived the next morning. His name was *Herman Osipovich* Schulz, a Russian of German extraction. He confirmed my diagnosis and recommended *banki*. Banki are basically small glasses the size of a shot glass. They are put in a tub filled with warm water then individually taken out, rapidly heated inside with a flame from an alcohol lamp and applied to the patient's back. When the "banka" cools off, a vacuum forms inside it which draws blood to the surface of the skin. After about 10 minutes the little glasses are removed and the patient's back is decorated with round red circles half-dollar in diameter. There may not be a scientific basis to this treatment, but it never failed in those times when the word "antibiotic" did not even exist.

When Herman Osipovich Schulz found out that we were from Warsaw, he could hardly hide his delight. It turned out that in 1905 while serving in the Russian army he was quartered in the military barracks next to the Royal Castle in Warsaw. Schulz was a short stocky fellow about 50 years old with a red face and a nose the color of a bright red peony, betraying his love of vodka, and a big silver mustache. His son was a veterinarian serving in the Red Army with the rank of a captain. Herman Osipovich told us about the *sovchoz* because he had lived in one for a number of years. A *sovchoz* was a state operated agricultural enterprise. Workers were paid in money and not in products and just like factory workers bought bread and other things (when available!) in stores, and had their mess hall. The *sovchoz* where Schulz lived was a stud farm specializing in the breeding of race horses, as well as draft horses and consisted of three villages. For that reason that *sovchoz* was called *konzavod* which means "horse factory." Schulz left after a few hours, but visited us several times during the three weeks that my uncle was sick. "It is a shame to let good people perish!" he used to say.

In March we received the last letters from Iggi and Lou who served in the Polish Army. They wrote that shortly they would be evacuated to Iran. Lou wrote that he would probably be able to take with him Jay and Jim ("The Beetles") with whom he had lived in the settlement as well as their wives because the servicemen were permitted to take their families with them. We envied those people who now would be

able to leave the Soviet Union. We realized that they had lived through hell before reaching the Polish Army units. We also knew that thousands of Polish exiles had died in the south from typhus and other diseases. The "Roadsides in the south are thick with Polish graves," wrote Jim in one of his letters. From the reports in the Soviet newspapers we knew about the military situation in North Africa where Rommel's *Afrika Korps* was approaching Egypt and that his goal was to reach *Baku* and the Soviet oil fields through the Near East. We realized that the Polish Army was being evacuated to Iran in order to become part of a defense strategy designed to stop Rommel's advance. We knew that the Polish Army was going to the front to fight and not to have fun. Nevertheless we envied them because it would be better to be at the battle front outside the Soviet Union than in a quiet village inside that country.

At the end of March my uncle and I went to the forest to bring a supply of firewood for the last time before the spring thaw. We had to drive 10 km (6¼ mile) to the forest where the collective farm had purchased a parcel. We drove in the morning, had to cut down a few trees and saw them up because no wood was prepared. We returned home in the evening. Nothing unusual occurred during the trip, except that we had a scare coming back from the forest. The road into the village ran down a steep hill. As soon as my uncle and I climbed onto the sled, "The Collective Farmer" for some reason took off downhill like bat out of hell. We held on to the ropes with which the wood was tied to the sled because falling off the sled at that breakneck speed would have had dire consequences. Fortunately nothing happened and we arrived home safely.

In April the snow started to melt and streams of filthy water cascaded down the village streets uncovering mountains of garbage and manure. The animal farm was having serious problems: every day one or two sheep died. Uncle Petya was nervous and depressed because he was haunted by visions of imprisonment as a result of the dying animals. One morning all of the women went home to do some cooking, and I was alone on duty in the animal farm. We expected one of the cows to give birth, so every now and then I went into the cow shed to check whether or not the delivery had started. In the watchman's cubicle there were several lambs with their mothers, one sickly half-year old lamb and two calves so the stink was unbearable, and I preferred to stay outside. Shortly after the noon hour I went to check on that cow and noticed that she was laying down and delivering. In the past I had seen sheep giving birth to lambs but this was an unusual case because the cow was young and it was her first delivery. The poor creature was having a rough time. The calf came out half-way and remained that way. The amniotic sack was not opened and, remembering lectures from my two years of medical studies at the University of Warsaw, I realized I had to do something fast because the calf would asphyxiate otherwise. With my fingers I tore the amniotic membrane near the calf's nostrils and started pulling him by his front legs. A few minutes later a healthy little bull laid on the straw snorting happily. At that time Uncle Petya arrived in the shed and congratulated me on a job well done. We waited until the happily purring mother licked the amniotic membrane off the calf and carried him to the watchman's cubicle. We named the newborn bull "Mike" in my honor.

When Uncle Petya returned to the animal farm at dusk, he pointed to the sickly half-year old lamb and said: "Mike, if you take his carcass then I will slaughter the poor thing because he will croak anyway. This way at least you will have some meat. He is quite skinny but meat is meat." I agreed without any hesitation because we had not had any meat soup for a very long time. Half an hour later the skinned lamb with innards removed hung outside on a hook. It so happened that our farm veterinarian stopped for a chat, so he examined the meat, pronounced it fit for consumption although extremely lean and decided that the lamb was just debilitated. That evening, to the utter surprise of my family, I brought the meat home and for a whole week afterwards we had meat soups.

Despite the thaw which caused all of the collective farm work to stop, we were very busy on the animal farm. The veterinarian used to come for several days to castrate the little rams and bull calves. I assisted him in this job which was somewhat related to medicine. During several subsequent days the farmers came with their calves to "contract" them. A collective farmer was not permitted to keep and raise a calf. Neither was he permitted to slaughter it and sell the meat privately. He had to sell the calf to the collective farm which paid 2 pounds of grain for each pound of meat "on the hoof." The farmer was given only 100 pounds of grain and the remainder was deducted from his debt or payment was promised after the new harvest. Although the paid out grain was of the poorest quality, nevertheless people were happy to get it.

At about this time our landlady's health began to fail and she moved to her daughter-in-law Luba's home. She left behind an unbelievable amount of lice as a souvenir. Frequently we had tried to figure out how the lice got into our bedding and we blamed them on my little cousin, Kathy, who, we assumed, brought the vermin from school. After our landlady moved out we did find out from Luba that she had to burn all of the old woman's clothing. We could not afford the "luxury" of burning our clothes and, consequently, were unable to get rid of the lice for the remainder of our stay in the Soviet Union. It was truly a miracle that we did not come down with typhus.

At the end of April the old woman died and a letter arrived from her son in Kuibyshev requesting us to vacate the cabin because he would be moving back into the village with his family. We had 5-6 weeks to find new quarters, but in the meantime important changes took place in our lives. The spring sowing time was rapidly approaching, and my uncle asked the manager of the tractor shop to hire me as a time keeper for the tractor brigade which was to work on our collective farm. Vasily Ivanovich agreed immediately. In the last days of April I quit my job on the animal farm, reported to the office of the tractor shop and met my new boss, Uncle Nicholas, a quiet pleasant man, around 30 years old with ten-years of tractor-related work experience. The next day the whole brigade met in the cabin of Aunt Olena, a very nice woman, who had been the cook for the tractor brigade for the past several years. In attendance were the foreman, Uncle Nicholas, his deputy, Valentin, a tall youth, who was my age, and several tractor drivers. Uncle Nicholas and Valentin were the oldest members of the brigade. Shurka, a good looking dark youth and small blue-eyed Sashka were 17 years old, Niurka, the daughter of Aunt Lonia, my coworker on the animal farm, and Olga were 16 years old. Also present were several tractor driver helpers, people who manned the plows, harrows and seeders.

Uncle Nicholas introduced me as the brigade's time keeper and explained to me the intricacies of my future work. Two large machines on tank-like threads and two small ones with wheels belonged to the brigade. Each tractor was assigned a daily norm depending upon its job (i.e. plowing, harrowing, sowing or cultivating). Each hectare (2.471 acres) was assigned a different amount of fuel, depending upon the tractor and upon the type of work performed by it. The norm for grease and oil was 5-10% of the norm for fuel. The earnings of the drivers depended upon the amount of work done. A driver earned 5 workdays for a norm on a large tractor and 4.5 workdays on a small one. Furthermore, 3 kg (6.5 pounds) of grain was the pay for each workday earned. A driver's helper earned 50% of his driver's workdays but was paid just as much as a collective farmer for each workday. I was earning two workdays daily; i.e. 6 kg (13.2 pounds) of grain. The foreman was paid the average earnings of the brigade plus 30% and his deputy was paid the average earnings of the brigade plus 20%. The tractor shop office supplied me with tables listing jobs, norms and the use of fuel.

My work consisted of three parts: (1) measuring the work area done and calculating the earnings, (2) keeping records of fuel consumption with respect to the work done (fuel was under the preview of Aunt Pauline), and (3) filling out the requisitions for the products from the collective farm's store. Uncle Nicholas had settled with the chairman of the collective farm that each member of the brigade would get 1 kg (2.2 pounds) of bread, 50 gm (almost 2 ounces) of butter, 50 gm of meat, 100 gm ($\frac{1}{4}$ pound) of cereals, and 200 gm ($\frac{1}{2}$ pound) of cabbage daily. Uncle Nicholas told me: "Take your part home for your family. It will come in handy. In the brigade there is enough food to take care of you."

The first tractor left for the fields on May Day. Because the ground was still wet, the foreman sent a large machine with threads rather than with wheels, a KhTZ (Kharkov Tractor Factory), driven by Vasya. That afternoon, equipped with a *sazhen*, which was a two-meter (two-yard) measuring device shaped like a large compass, I went into the field where the tractors worked. On the way I planned out my record keeping method. I would measure and calculate the total area of the field. At the end of each day I would calculate the area of the field covered by the tractor and subtract it from the total area of the particular field. When work on that field was finished, I would know how many acres had been completed. Otherwise if I were to add up the areas corresponding to the daily work of a tractor, I would end up with a total for the area of a field greater than its true area. Since the fields were rectangular, I had to measure the length of a field only once and at the end of the day measure only the width of the portion covered by the tractor. Every evening I had to submit the data about that day's work to the collective farm's office which transmitted the data by phone to the regional office in charge of the collective farms. Every five days I had to submit reports to the tractor shop office about the work done by the brigade and its fuel

consumption.

After a few days the earth dried out, all four tractors left for the fields and I began to familiarize myself with the machines, with the people working on them and with their hard and demanding work. The biggest tractor was a ChTZ (Chelabinsk Tractor Factory), with big threads and an 80 HP engine. It could pull two plows each with five plowshares, five harrows and two seeders. After one trip around the field the ChTZ plowed, harrowed and seeded an 8-meter (about 24 feet) width of the field because each plow was 2 meters wide. Small Sashka drove that tractor. He looked very funny on top of the giant machine, 15 meters (45 feet) above the ground, in filthy work clothes, with his black hands and smiling black face in which only his blue eyes and white teeth were very noticeable. Next in terms of power was the 60 HP KhTZ driven by Vasya. This machine was also on threads, but the driver sat in a small cabin which protected him from the elements. The tractor had four forward speeds and one reverse. It could pull one plow with five plowshares, two harrows and one seeder. Both of the two remaining tractors had wheels. One, a ChTZ, was capable of pulling only one plow with three plowshares and the other, a small U-2, was used exclusively for harrowing and sowing.

As soon as all of the tractors went to work, we also moved into the fields. Our "command post" was a sort of small caboose with a cabinet and a few short narrow plank beds. A few yards from it was the fuel dump, consisting of 500 liters (125 gallons) of kerosene in a kettle covered with a wooden lid, several additional barrels with kerosene as well as a few barrels and pails with grease. Because there was always close to 1000 liters (250 gallons) of fuel near the "command post," we always had to be especially careful when we were smoking, because the tiniest spark could cause an explosion with disastrous results. Aunt Olena prepared the food on an extemporaneous hearth, and the menu was the same every day: cabbage soup with meat and grits with butter.

I quickly made friends with the tractor drivers, and today when I reminisce about my working with them, I consider it to be the most pleasant and carefree period of my six years of forced exile in the Soviet Union. My arrival time at work was 8 o'clock in the morning and, after writing the requisitions for provisions, I went into the fields to measure the work completed by the night shift; work in the fields went on 24 hours a day unless the machines broke down. Then I returned to the "caboose" and calculated the area of work completed, the corresponding earnings and the fuel consumption. An hour later my work was done, and I went into the fields to watch the drivers repair their tractors.

One or two tractors were always being repaired by their drivers and very often all four were inoperative. I became particularly friendly with Shurka, who drove one of the small tractors and with a newly arrived driver, Fedya, a very pleasant, quiet and polite youngster, who operated a big ChTZ. Often I would ride with them, and they would let me drive their tractors. I used to get behind the controls and imagine that I was driving a car. After several days I operated the machines like an old hand and was able to spell the drivers who, after having worked all night, had to continue working the day shift also because there were just not enough workers to spell each other.

Once I overheard Uncle Nicholas using me as an example for other members of the brigade. I felt badly about it and asked him not to do it any more. Deep in my heart I felt compassion for those 16-year old girls and boys. At the time of their lives when they became adolescents, these children already had to work hard and earn money. Work in a tractor brigade was undoubtedly the heaviest of all of the possible work on a collective farm. People always wore grimy and greasy clothes, and went unwashed for a week because for lack of soap. They slept in the "caboose," or under it if there was no room inside, or worked 24-hours and seldom if ever complained. Once a week they were permitted to go home for 1/2 day to wash up. No wonder that after 10 days of this kind of work the kids looked like walking shadows and all had colds.

I tried to help them out in any way I could, but the drivers only permitted me to operate their tractors and kept me away from any other work. "What do you need it for?" they would ask. "You are doing plenty and as is it you are doing work which is not expected of you." And so I would operate the tractors for several hours before noon while Shurka or Fedya caught a few winks. However, driving a tractor was not easy work either. The machines were very old and although repaired and readied every winter they were in pitiful condition. Because of the war effort there were no spare parts, so totally useless tractors were

cannibalized for parts that were then used to repair those machines that, hopefully, could still work. The radiators were full of holes and water leaked out of them, consequently, every few hundred yards it was necessary to stop the tractor and add water to the radiator from one of the several barrels placed "strategically" throughout the field. Whenever a plow would get a little deeper into the soil, it was imperative to press on the accelerator right away, because otherwise the engine would stall and often it was difficult to restart it. When it became necessary to restart a tractor, usually two drivers would crank the engine for about an hour, swearing as only Russians can, removing and cleaning the spark plugs, using up unbelievable quantities of fuel and in the end still not being able to start the engine despite all those Herculean efforts. I think a philosopher once said that machines sometimes act maliciously toward people. I do not know how true it is but, the tractors in our brigade seemed to prove that point.

At approximately noon the driver for whom I pitched in, would come to work rested and fed, and I would go to get my meal: soup, groats and bread. Then I read the paper which was delivered to the brigade, took an hour nap and again went into the fields to ride the tractors. Around 4 p.m. I measured the work done by the day shift, prepared a report for the collective farm management, made out requisitions for the next day's provisions and went home. On the way I would stop in the administration office to turn in the daily report.

I worked through May, and the tractor shop management as well as the brigade and I were pleased with my work. By that time my uncle had stopped working in the tractor shop office and took a job with the management of the Selpo; i.e. the cooperative. It was a better job and "closer to the trough" as the Russians used to describe it so vividly. In this case it meant that he was closer to the village store and to the goods (primarily vodka) when they arrived. And vodka could buy and accomplish anything short of true miracles!

My uncle got the new job quite by chance. Comrade Kulin, an evacuee from the Kursk province was appointed to head the local cooperative. Because he was lame he had escaped being drafted into the army. One day he came to the tractor shop and struck up an acquaintance with my uncle. Since Kulin needed a bookkeeper, he offered the position to my uncle who, not having the foggiest idea about bookkeeping, did not feel qualified to fill the position. But Kulin would not give up: "We will prepare balance sheets together. You will catch on in a few days. After all, you know the advantages of working in the Selpo." It was a proposition my uncle could not refuse so he transferred. We did not have to wait long for the advantages because on the second day my uncle brought home two liters (approx. two quarts) of vodka which we used to buy potatoes for planting. One Sunday in May the Selpo handy man plowed "our field" and the following week my aunt, Kathy and I planted potatoes while my uncle was away for a few days delivering the monthly balance sheets to the regional office of the cooperative. We hoped that we would not use those potatoes because we did not want to remain in that village but wanted instead to move somewhere where there were Poles, although we did not know at that time how this could be accomplished.

One day I was called by Mikhail Grigorevich into his office. A Ukrainian evacuated from Nikolaev, Mikhail Grigorevich was the deputy director for political affairs (*politruk*) of the tractor shop. He asked me to sit down and said: "You will have to carry out the political education in your brigade. This is one of the time keeper's duties." I tried to protest: "But Mikhail Grigorevich I am neither a member of the Party nor of the *Komsomol* (the Communist Youth Organization); furthermore, I am a foreigner. How can I carry out the brigade's political education?" Mikhail Grigorevich was not about to budge: "It's OK. It will suffice for you to read the daily newspaper to the members of your brigade and put out a wall bulletin to which they will submit their observations and articles." Well, there was no point in discussing this matter any further. Any additional objections on my part would only be construed by Mikhail Grigorevich as sabotage and activity directed against the Soviet state. I returned to the brigade and told Uncle Nicholas, the brigade foreman, about my conversation with the deputy director. Uncle Nicholas became livid and started yelling: "What an idiot! Doesn't he really understand that tractor drivers have no time to eat or wash up and yet he expects them to write newspaper articles! You can read the daily paper to them when they take their meals, and if you yourself want to write the wall bulletin it would be great!" I remarked to Uncle Nicholas that frankly I didn't give a damn about the wall bulletin. "You are right," he said but could not calm down for a long time and remarked to Valentin, his deputy: "Such a stupid *Khokhol* (a derogatory Russian name for Ukrainians). Instead of getting on a tractor and working like everybody else, he sticks his nose

everywhere and shoves his f propaganda down everyone's throat!."

Because our tractor brigade as well as the collective farm demonstrated unsatisfactory work efficiency, the Regional Committee of the Party did what was perfectly customary, i.e. asked its provincial counterpart to send a party member from a factory to improve the work efficiency. The local party committee was of the opinion that a factory worker from the city had a better developed organizational sense, and was sharper and more devoted to the Party than a "country communist." Those so called "plenipotentiaries" were supposed "to benefit" the collective farm. The true benefit was primarily to themselves. They had a vacation with pay and could also eat enough to last them a year, because the collective gave them whatever provisions they desired. In addition, they took a supply with them upon returning home. And so "on one day in the month of May" Comrade Fedorov, a skinny underfed worker from *Kuibyshev*, arrived in the village and visited our brigade. He immediately called a meeting and delivered a fiery speech full of Party inspired slogans about the "importance of a strong rear front in the overall war effort." The speech, a *melange* of editorials from several issues of the provincial newspaper, was studded with citations from "*The Short Course in the History of GKP (b)*" (the Great Communist Party of the Bolsheviks). The citations were quoted as "Comrade Lenin said..." or "Our Great Leader and Teacher, Comrade Stalin said..." The listeners were clearly bored. Tractor drivers either snoozed or thought about their cursed tractors. Finally comrade Fedorov finished his pep talk. Uncle Nicholas got up and said that the brigade would work hard in order to help vanquish the enemy by fulfilling its duty on the rear front, the collective farm's fields. We all applauded loudly, and the meeting adjourned.

The tractor drivers went to work while comrade Fedorov and I went to our "command post," the little caboose. He familiarized himself with the work of the brigade, with the norms, etc. and busied himself with issuing a wall bulletin. A few days later the bulletin appeared on a dirty wall of our caboose with two articles authored by comrade Fedorov and by Uncle Nicholas. I submitted some data about the work completed up to the "time of publication." Now, comrade Fedorov and I were forced to spend a lot of time together in the "command post." When I left in the morning to take the measurements, comrade Fedorov would go to the tractor area and stick his nose into everything, driving the workers and Uncle Nicholas out of their minds. Upon my return from the fields I would find comrade Fedorov reading the newspaper in the caboose and waiting for breakfast, which Aunt Olena cooked outside. She used to greet me with "Mike, breakfast will be ready soon," knowing how much I liked groats with butter.

Whenever I did my calculations and reports in the "command post," comrade Fedorov seemed to be very interested in what I did. And no wonder, after all his future depended on how well the brigade was doing. Would he remain in the collective farm or would he be called back to Kuibyshev and kicked out of the Party? During breakfast we discussed various subjects. Whenever our conversation touched on political topics I became very careful and always agreed with his point of view which made the "plenipotentiary" take a liking toward me. "Beware of Party members" was my Golden Rule. Therefore, I tried to talk with him as little as possible and right after breakfast went into the fields to spell the drivers, while comrade Fedorov went to sleep inside the caboose or outside, if the flies were too pesky.

At that time many interesting and pleasant things took place in our monotonous lives. Because of the serious military situation on the Russian-German front, the government decided to build a strategic railroad between Ulyanovsk and Syzran which would connect those two cities with a more direct line. Both cities had many airplane and munitions factories and the present line was approximately 280 km (175 miles) long whereas the new one would be only 120 km (75 miles). The tracks would run 1.5 km (almost 1 mile) from our village. A station was to be located on the sovchoz, the stud farm. Railroad teams arrived at the end of May and organized a construction headquarters. A *tent city* grew outside our village and scores of workers mobilized for the so called "Work Front" were brought and housed in those tents. These individuals were weak, crippled or old, in other words, unsuitable for active military service. Most of them were the almond-eyed inhabitants of the southern Asian republics. One day a barefoot man in a worn out suit came to our cabin. He wanted to exchange 200 grams ($\frac{1}{2}$ pound) of sugar which he had received in the store for milk. My aunt told him that we had neither a cow nor even a goat. Then she turned to me and said in Polish: "I would like to surprise Kathy and buy that sugar for her." At that moment the newcomer, with a big grin on his face, handed my aunt the little sack with sugar and said also in Polish: "Since you are also from Poland, please take the sugar for the child." He categorically refused to accept any money, and when my aunt just as categorically refused to accept the sugar, our compatriot

handed the "treasure" to my little cousin saying: "This is for Miss Kathy." Kathy blushed, thanked the man and added: "I am not a miss, I am a child." The three of us burst laughing.

When my uncle came home from work, we invited our visitor, Mr. Surgiel, to stay for supper. During the meal, which was accompanied by quite a bit of vodka, he told us his story. Mr. Surgiel was from the vicinity of *Suwalki*, a town in the northeastern part of Poland, where he had owned a large farm. When the Red Army occupied those territories on September 17, 1939, he was arrested, sentenced to eight years at hard labor and sent to one of the numerous prison camps in the north of the Soviet Union. After amnesty was declared in the summer of 1941, Mr. Surgiel found himself on a collective farm near *Singiley*, in the Ulyanovsk district, from where he was mobilized for the "Work Front" and sent to build the railroad. Mr. Surgiel became a frequent visitor in our cabin and we noticed that his behavior was somewhat strange, as if he were "out to lunch" most of the time. It turned out, as he told me once, that he had fallen off of a horse while serving in the Polish cavalry and had suffered a brain concussion.

A few days later I was working in the "command post" when Uncle Stepan, the one-eyed foreman of the sowing brigade, said to me with an air of mystery: "Mike, a compatriot of yours, who works on the railroad with the surveyors, is staying at my daughter's." I was happy to hear that and Uncle Stepan promised to send him to us. That evening a second Pole, found in this God forsaken village near the Volga River, came over. He was a young man, my age, and hailed from Warsaw where he had graduated from one of the vocational schools. His name was Steve. In the summer of 1940, he and his uncle were shipped from *Bialystok* to one of the villages in the north of the Soviet Union where he worked as a mechanic in a saw mill. After the amnesty in 1941 they left their village, but the uncle became ill and had to be left in a hospital in Ulyanovsk. Steve went down the Volga River by boat to look for work and planned to return for his uncle. At that time everyone was talking about *land of milk and honey*, the German Region on the Volga. Steve did not find any work there and returned to Ulyanovsk to get his uncle, but the man had just disappeared; so Steve went to Gorky where he worked as a lathe operator in a munitions factory until his mobilization for the "Work Front." We became very friendly with Steve, and he used to come over every day after work. He was a pleasant looking young man of medium height and with blond hair. His one unpleasant trait was that he thought he knew everything and that no other person was as smart as he was. Well, after several weeks we straightened him out on that score, which was fortunate for all concerned because we "adopted" Steve, who became like one of the family for the next two years, *i.e.* until 1944.

We found out from Steve why trying to get settled in the German Region of the Volga River was not possible. The two cities he visited, *Marx* and *Engels*, were deserted; the houses were boarded up or in ruins. The towns and small harbors along the Volga looked as if plague had passed through them. The few Russians whom Steve encountered told him what had happened in this "land of milk and honey." A few weeks after the outbreak of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, paratroopers dressed in German uniforms had been dropped into the Region. Its inhabitants, russified Germans, whose ancestors had been brought by Empress Catherine the Great (1762-96) to colonize that area, hid them. At this point there are two versions of what occurred: according to one version the paratroopers were German soldiers; according to the second the whole affair was a Soviet provocation, and Soviet planes dropped NKVD troopers dressed in German uniforms. At any rate, the whole German population was shipped to the deserts of Kazakhstan, to the tundra of the Far North, or to Siberia. Only those German women whose husbands were Russian were permitted to remain.

Our lives were moving at their usual pace. Both my uncle and I worked. In May, I received 70 kg (over 150 pounds) of flour. That was a lot and part of it we were even able to exchange for butter. In the beginning of June the son of our deceased landlady returned from Kuibyshev with his wife, daughter and a cow. Life in the city had become very difficult. Prices were inflated and the price of flour, the main staple of the population, had skyrocketed. The peasants, who had left the collective farms to work in the cities, were now flocking back to the villages. We had to move out of the cabin and fortunately found a place next to the Selpo office. A few days later we moved to our new quarters with the main advantage being that my uncle worked next door, so we did not have to worry about being burglarized. (Burglaries had begun to occur in the otherwise peaceful village). In June the days became hot, and the nights short and bright. How mysterious the village looked in that dusk light when the singing of strolling village girls filled the air!

The work in our brigade proceeded at a slow pace. During the day I sun-bathed and listened to the singing of the girls attending the seeders. I have to admit that I had never before heard such a skillful blending of voices. In the middle of June the main shaft of our biggest tractor cracked and a spare one could not be found in our shop or in any other shop in the whole district. An SOS went out to all tractor shops in the Kuibyshev region. In the meantime the sowing dragged, and the threat that only 50% of the collective farm's land would be cultivated loomed on the horizon. Representatives of the authorities and of the Party, as well as the NKVD commandant, arrived from Pavlovo. They walked through the fields and threatened to take to court and imprison the chairman of the collective farm, his foremen and all of the tractor drivers. They called the "plenipotentiary" a nitwit and a blunderer, threatened to throw him out of the Party and to send him back to Kuibyshev. All day long the "chiefs" raged at the brigade. Whenever we met they looked at me with disdain: *Polyak*, a Pole. I tried to avoid them and keep out of sight, because they were embarrassed to verbally abuse the poor tractor drivers in my presence.

At dusk the "chiefs" finally got lost but no benefits resulted from their visit. Neither did the two parts of the cracked shaft fuse together nor did a new shaft fall down from heaven like the Biblical manna. A few days after the "chiefs'" stormy visit though, its benefits began to be felt. Another "plenipotentiary" arrived from the district town to assist the first one, and 9 small tractors with 18 drivers arrived from the sovchoz. In our "command post," at the fuel dump and in the fields there was a constant commotion. Now I had 12 tractors' work to measure. This was more difficult, because a small tractor did not seem to be able to fulfill the norm for plowing. When a field was long the best a small tractor could do was 5-6 round trips daily and that constituted less than a norm. The borrowed tractors were with us for two weeks and although I was very busy during that time, I always found a few spare moments for a talk with the new "plenipotentiary." He was an older man who represented the State Commissariat for Collecting Taxes in Products in the district. While serving in the Russian army, he was stationed in Warsaw in 1914-1915 and frequently reminisced about those times. As he was a Party member our talks were limited to his talking and my listening and shaking my head in an affirmative manner. One had to watch oneself when talking with a Party member. The new "plenipotentiary" surprised me with his frankness. He was unbiased and saw the negative sides of the Soviet system as well as the positive ones.

In the first days of July 1942 some important events changed our monotonous way of life that had otherwise consisted of work in the tractor brigade or in the *Sel'po* office and diligent watering of the 360 tobacco seedlings that we had planted on the plot next to our new home. We received a cable from our friends whom we had not heard from for two years, *i.e.* since our forced departure from Lvov. They lived in Chelyabinsk, worked in the office of the Polish Embassy Representative and mailed us a parcel with some clothes. A few days later a cable arrived from the Polish Embassy which stated: *"A Home for Polish Invalids is being organized in the Koshki District of the Kuibyshev Province. Proceed immediately to Koshki where you will meet a trustee of the Embassy. Money for expenses will follow. Polish Embassy."*

We were exuberant. Stuck as we were in a remote Russian village, we were not forgotten after all. We suspected that the Berger family from our camp, who had stayed in the Embassy's dormitory in Kuibyshev, was, to a large extent, instrumental in orchestrating this turn of events. In the meantime, my uncle wrote to the district commandant of the militia asking for a pass to Koshki on the basis of the official cable. The local militiaman, who frequently posed as a model for my uncle's sketches, immediately took the application to Pavlovo. After a few days a money order for 200 *rubles* from the Embassy arrived by cable and "our" militiaman personally brought the official pass for a trip to Koshki.

At that time travel in the Soviet Union required passes or travel orders, and purchase of tickets for trains or boats required presentation of a valid pass or travel order. Military patrols constantly checked the documents of all passengers. In cities and towns there were constant roundups; men without proper documents were sent to a military assembly point, from there to a camp for six weeks of military training, and then to the battle front. According to the agreement between the Polish Government in Exile and the Government of the Soviet Union, Poles were exempted from being drafted into the Red Army or into the "Work Front." The Soviet authorities frequently violated the latter exemption. The cases of Surgiel and Steve were perfect examples of such Soviet noncompliance.

Finally my uncle, equipped with the pass, the original cable from the Embassy, 200 *rubles*, a loaf of

bread, a small jar with butter and two quarter-liter (two half-pint) bottles of vodka for "emergency gifts" went to Pavlovo with the manager of the tractor shop. We anxiously awaited his return from the Koshki region. During his absence a new bookkeeper, Vasya, pitched in for my uncle at work. Vasya was 22 years old and walked on crutches because one of his legs had been severed by a belt between the engine and a threshing machine at harvest time. Vasya used to sleep on a trunk in the Selpo office and covered himself with a jacket.

No sooner had I gotten home from the fields one day, when a violent thunderstorm swept over the village. It was raining cats and dogs. Lightning brightened our room almost constantly, and the thunder sounded like an artillery barrage. Kathy was in bed, with her head burried under a pillow, because she was deathly afraid of thunderstorms. I was talking with my aunt. Suddenly Vasya started knocking loudly on the wall between the *Selpo* office and our room and asking me to come immediately. I thought something had happened to him, and ran outside through the driving rain to the office, because its entrance was on the other side of the house.

I went in and found Vasya sitting at the desk, his shirt unbuttoned, the two crutches on the floor in the middle of the room, a glass on the desk and next to it an almost empty half-liter (pint) bottle of vodka and a small plate with pickles. Vasya was totally plastered. "*Sit down.*" He said and emptied the bottle into the glass. "*Drink!*" Well, I would be lying if I said that I did not like to have a drink or two, but I had never been in a situation like that before. In the meantime, Vasya put the empty bottle under the desk, pulled out a full one, poured himself a half-glass of vodka and emptied it in one gulp. Looking straight at me with his misty and bloodshot eyes Vasya solemnly pronounced: "*Life is not worth a s ...! Life is not worth a s ... and without any future! The only pleasure that is sometimes left for a man is vodka!*" He poured another half-glass of vodka. It was my turn. I downed it, swallowed a piece of pickle and began feeling warm. The scene was positively ghastly. The room was half-dark, lighted only by occasional lightning. Since it was still raining, there was no reason to worry about someone walking by and looking into the office through a window. We emptied that bottle of vodka and half of the next one.

All the time I had to listen to drunken Vanya's monologue on the topics of life, Bolshevism, etc. The monologue was richly spiked with the most elaborate curses and swear words. Finally Vasya dropped his head on the desk and fell asleep. It stopped raining and the thunderstorm passed through, so I put the partly empty bottle with vodka under the desk to join two full bottles and the other empty one, closed the door and went home. I reeked of alcohol. "*It is dangerous to light a match near you because it may cause an explosion,*" my aunt remarked half seriously. I told her about my experience with Vasya. We had supper and went to bed. That night I slept unusually well.

After several days my uncle returned from his trip and that evening we stayed up well into the night listening to his report of the trip and the good news. He had no difficulty getting from Pavlovo to Ulyanovsk by boat. In Ulyanovsk he walked on foot from the pier to the railroad station, a distance of about 4 miles. Since the walk took him through the city, the 4-mile distance did not seem long. The only tiring part of it was climbing 600 steps from the pier to the city. He had no problem buying a train ticket once he showed the "magic" official telegram. A bottle of vodka helped him get into the car because otherwise he would have had to remain on the platform despite his ticket. It turned out that in every car of a Soviet train there is a woman-guide (*provodnik*) whose duties are similar to those of a conductor and a cleaning person. Depending upon her whim one gets or does not get into the car even if one is in the possession of a valid ticket. My uncle traveled 90 miles by train and got off at a station called Pogruznaya from where he walked 2 miles to the district town, Koshki. There, in the "Home of the Collective Farmer" my uncle met the trustee of the Polish Embassy, Mr. Dunin. He was an older sickly gentleman who lived in *Melekess*, a town located halfway between Ulyanovsk and Pogruznaya.

The next day the two of them went to the *Raispolkom* (Regional Executive Committee). Its chairman received them very formally and provided with information about the future home for Polish invalids. The following day Mr. Dunin and my uncle went to *Sergeyevka*, a village 10 miles from Koshki, where they met the village mayor, *Anna Pavlovna*. She showed them the building assigned to house the invalids, and they met with the six Polish families that lived in the village. They were former Polish settlers from the eastern part of Poland, who were forced in Kuibyshev to interrupt their journey from the North to join the Polish Army units in the South, because they came down with typhus. When they recovered, the

Embassy sent them to this region because the russified Germans, who had originally lived in several of the villages, were exiled shortly after the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union in 1941, and the *Tatars*, *Mordvins* and *Chuvashs*, native to that region were "mobilized" and moved to those villages. Subsequently they were joined by Poles sent by the Embassy. Among the six Polish families in Sergeyevka were 4 men, 3 youths (13-15 years old), 7 girls and older women and 7 children. All worked in the fields, all were undernourished because of lack of fats and sugar, and their clothes were in tatters. Anna Pavlovna called all of the Poles into the conference room next to her office for a "meeting with the Polish authorities." During the meeting the women cried and yelled that they would perish without some kind of help. Mr. Dunin explained that the Polish Embassy would send clothes and provisions, and that the Home for Invalids would also help with additional food for the children. Both Mr. Dunin and my uncle were very warmly welcomed by the school principal, *Maria Alekseyevna*, her sister *Valya* and their old mother. Anna Pavlovna, the mayor of Sergeyevka, invited "the Polish dignitaries" to her home for dinner. She lived with her two children and a mother-in-law. Anna Pavlovna had been evacuated from Moscow where her husband had died during the present war. Both she and the school principal were Party members. The chairman of the collective farm, *Sergei Stepanovich*, an older man with a goatee (nicknamed by the farmers "Goat"), was also invited to dinner. At dusk the Polish representatives were driven to Koshki. For two more days they were busy with all kinds of formalities and then each left for home.

We decided to leave the "Red Star" collective farm within the next 7-10 days. The following day Mr. Surgiel and Steve came over. When we told them about our decision to leave, they decided to join us. Of course, they could not be released from the work on the railroad because they had been mobilized. Thus they decided to leave without notifying anyone or as it was aptly described in the Soviet Union at that time "*to desert from the Work Front*." It meant the risk of traveling without a pass, being stopped by a military patrol or militia which would have dire consequences, including the possibility of imprisonment. Nevertheless, they wanted to chance it in order to move to an area with a greater concentration of Poles. In the meantime we applied to the regional militia office for travel passes, started liquidating our assets and putting our affairs in order. My uncle transferred his work to Vasya, and I did all of the calculations until July 20, 1942, the day when Uncle Nicholas would take over my duties until a new time keeper could be found. The whole brigade was sorry to see me go. Uncle Nicholas and his deputy tried to convince me to stay through harvesting and thrashing when I could get all of my earned grain and then join the family. I was afraid that later on I would not get a travel pass. "*Strike while the iron is hot*" is both a Polish and an English proverb, so I asked the collective farm to settle my accounts. I had earned a total of 624 kg of grain for my work in the "Red Star" collective farm but took 428 kg on account. Because there was an insufficient supply of grain in the warehouse, I received 96 kg (over 200 pounds) and was supposed to pick up the remaining 100 kg (220 pounds) after the harvest. I was also charged 82.50 rubles for the food that I had consumed in the tractor brigade. We decided to take with us 16 kg (35 pounds) of flour and 24 kg (53 pounds) of grain, and bartered the remainder for butter and honey. We expected a package and a letter from our friends in Chelyabinsk but nothing arrived. We were surprised by their silence and only when my uncle went to the Embassy at the end of the following August, did we find out the reason for it.

On July 26, 1942, we received our ten-day travel passes. We packed our belongings in three days and waited to be driven to Pavlovo. Finally at dawn on July 29 we left the "Red Star" collective farm. Steve and Mr. Surgiel gave us their back packs and went on foot. The same day after a 7-hour ride we arrived at the wharf. Our two friends arrived shortly afterwards. The boat was due that evening. My uncle bought our tickets, and we decided on a plan of action to get our friends on the boat. The plan was very simple. Steve and Mr. Surgiel would help us carry our belongings onto the boat as if they were porters and would remain on the boat. The tickets were checked only at the foot of the gangway. During the trip and on alighting from the boat nobody checked tickets. No wonder that 90 percent of the passengers traveled with no tickets. When the boat arrived at the wharf, we put our plan into effect. Everything worked out OK, and our small group found itself on the boat. Kathy and my aunt stretched out on our things and fell asleep.

The next day at noontime we arrived in Ulyanovsk. We hired a cart with a driver, placed our belongings on the cart, put my aunt and Kathy on the top of them and went to railroad station in Ulyanovsk, a distance of about 6 km (4 miles) from the wharf. I looked in awe at the river harbor full of boats and at the mighty mile-long bridge across the Volga River. When our boat had passed under it, the

passengers were prohibited from being on the deck or staying near any windows under the deck to prevent the possibility of sabotage. When our boat approached the bridge, it stopped and tooted three times requesting permission to cross, and only when a flagman on the bridge waived his red flag, we were permitted to proceed. Now I could admire the bridge, a masterpiece of human engineering, joining one high bank of the Volga River to the other one. Both the bridge and the giant *Volodarski Works* were the target of several air raids by the German Luftwaffe, but Soviet antiaircraft batteries had managed to chase the planes away and the bridge was still intact.

Ulyanovsk was a very depressing city. Its streets were paved with field stones, the sidewalk slabs frequently pulled out, no canalization, piles of garbage and clouds of flies everywhere. The old university town of the czarist Russia, *Symbirsk*, the town of orchards and private *dachas* (villas), a town where the "Father of the Great Bolshevik Revolution," *Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov-Lenin*, was born and grew up was just a giant junk yard. In the center of town one could easily notice a symbol of the new authority, a five-story high prison, a white building surrounded by a high wall with watchtowers in every corner. Its windows were boarded up with slanted boards so that the prisoners could not look out but some light came into the cell through the rectangular opening at the top of the window.

Finally at about four o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at the railroad station, called *Ulyanovsk 1*. No one was permitted inside the station and the crowd of people waiting for the train sat on the street and on the lawn in front of the station building. We placed our belongings next to the wall of some building, and my uncle went to buy the tickets. Across the railroad station were the barracks of the Women's Air Force Service. Several columns of girls marched around the exercise yard singing "*Katyusha*" and "*Moskva moya*" ("Kathy" and "My Moscow"), two of the popular military marching songs of that period. Street urchins and onlookers waiting for the train gaped at the marching women-soldiers and exchanged snide remarks using some very juicy words and phrases. After a few minutes my uncle returned with the tickets. The ticket office had accidentally sold him a separate ticket for my little cousin, Kathy, and one-and-a-half tickets for my aunt, so we had an extra ticket for Steve. It was pure luck! Kathy was listed on my aunt's travel pass and the ticket office clerk had simply made a mistake. We wanted to give one of our passes to Mr. Surgiel so that he could buy a ticket but he did not want to spend any money. "*I will get on the train anyway.*" he said.

Our train was expected at 6:00 p.m. so we had two more hours of waiting. We decided to check in two of our suitcases in order to have fewer luggages with us in the coach. It turned out that in order to be shipped the suitcases had to be placed in sacks which in turn had to be sewn around. Consequently, my aunt unpacked two straw mattresses, we placed one suitcase in each and started sewing. We were so busy that we did not even notice when a young man in a railroader's uniform with an insignia indicating a higher rank had stopped by our group. Only when he greeted us in Polish did we stop our sewing and started talking with him. The railroader was an engineer of Polish extraction who had been evacuated from Leningrad. In 1939 he had worked in the railroad management in Lvov where he had picked up most of his Polish. He stayed with us for about ten minutes, asked about our situation, where we were going, etc. As soon as he left we commenced our sewing. We were almost through with our work when a young man in grey trousers and a white shirt approached us. "*So we are working.*" he said and my uncle confirmed his keen observation. "*Where are you going?*" he asked and my uncle told him our destination. From the man's demeanor and manner of talking we detected an NKVD officer. Mr. Surgiel disappeared; we prepared ourselves psychologically for an "encounter with authority." Our suspicions were confirmed when the newcomer introduced himself as the NKVD *politruk* (political officer) on duty at the railroad station. My uncle showed him the cable from the Embassy as well as the letter from Mr. Dunin bearing a triangular stamp and signed "Trustee of the Polish Embassy for the Koshki District." The letter requested that help be rendered to the Director of the Polish Home for the disabled traveling with his family. This made an impression on the NKVD *politruk* who immediately offered his assistance. "My office is at the station and if you need anything, please let me know. When the train arrives I will assist you with boarding it." The officer bowed and departed. It was obvious to us that the stamp on Mr. Dunin's letter had made the proper impression.

At this point I must explain the tremendous significance of the various seals used in the Soviet Union which I observed during my six-year stay in that country. The most important seal was a round one with the coat-of-arms of the country and a suitable inscription, used by all governmental departments,

organizations, etc. Next in importance was a round seal with a suitable inscription but without the state coat-of-arms. This one was used by cooperatives, collective farms, state farms, factories, etc. The least important was a triangular seal also with a suitable inscription which was used by physicians, physician assistants, etc. and now also by the Trustees of the Polish Embassy. The stamp was in the possession of a director, manager or the head of a particular department, enterprise, bureau, etc. at all times. Even when he/she went away on business or vacation the seal was not left with the next in command. The manager, director, etc. parted with the seal only upon leaving his/her position permanently. Usually, if the "keeper of the seal" was a man and he carried it in the hip pocket of his pants, wrapped in a piece of newspaper. (I have no idea where a woman, whose office entitled her to a round seal, carried this precious item!).

As stamp pads were a true rarity in the Soviet Union, one either smeared the seal with ink (a solution made from indelible pencil), or, if no ink was handy, spit on it, spread the saliva with a piece of paper and stamped the document. This having been accomplished, the seal went back into the pants' pocket. That was the reason why the underpants of all directors and managers had violet spots in the place corresponding to the hip pocket in which the precious seal was carried. I observed this phenomenon myself while still in the settlement because once I took a bath with the manager in the communal bathhouse. He even had a permanent round violet stain on his buttock. "The Round Seal" was one of those magic phrases in the Soviet Union and frequently had magical powers equal to those of a bottle of vodka, although many times a bottle of vodka was more helpful than a document with a round seal. I was told that a document without a round seal was meaningless even if it were signed by Stalin himself. Obtaining a round seal required an awful lot of preliminary work. A proposed design and a suitable inscription had to be submitted to the Regional Executive Committee of the Party, to the regional NKVD office and to several other related offices. Each office issued a permit and when all of the required permits were collected and presented to an engraver, only then did he accept the order for a "round seal."

While Mr. Dunin's letter carried a triangular seal rather than a round one, the content of the letter, the fact that we were Poles and, furthermore, the family of the Director of the Polish Home for the Disabled, carried weight in the eyes of the *politruk*. At that time Polish-Soviet relationships had begun to sour at the highest levels, but the low bureaucratic levels still operated according to the old directives of the Central Committee of the Party based on the July 30, 1941 Polish-Soviet agreement and the visit of the late Gen. Sikorski to Moscow at the end of that year.

Our train arrived at the station shortly before six o'clock. We went on the platform through a gate in the fence and walked toward the coach number that appeared on our tickets. The commotion on the platform was beyond description. Passengers, mainly servicemen, holding canteens or other containers, were running in all directions in search of *kipyatok*; i.e. hot water which was available at any station for free. In 1946, when we were shipped back to Poland, one could purchase food in station luncheonettes although it was quite expensive. During the war there were no luncheonettes in the railroad stations and one could only purchase rolls or pancakes from private "entrepreneurs" at exorbitant prices. We found our coach and encountered the limitless authority of the woman *provodnik*. She absolutely refused to let us into the coach because of our 16-pound sack of flour. Neither our pleas nor a bottle of vodka did any good: "It is against the law!" We found the *politruk* but his attempts at breaking the iron will of the *provodnik* even supported by "*Please, try to understand, Comrade, this is a representative of a foreign allied country, whose soldiers are fighting against our common enemy!*" did not change her stand. She had one pat answer to all our arguments *ZAKON*, the law, and nothing could be done about it. Resigned we left the platform and went back on the street. The *politruk* helped us carry our belongings. The next train was due at 10:00 a.m. What were we to do? Where to spend the night? At this point the *politruk* came up with a clever idea: "*Put the flour in a box. As far as sleeping is concerned I will ask the stationmaster to permit you to spend the night in the waiting room.*" My uncle went with the *politruk* to the stationmaster, while my aunt, Steve and I remained with a problem on our hands, namely where to find a box. Finally the problem was solved by emptying a small suitcase, placing the sack with the flour in it and the items from the suitcase into a sack.

After some time my uncle returned. The stationmaster agreed to our spending the night in the waiting room. Steve and Surgiel helped us carry our luggage toward the station. Mr. Surgiel could safely reappear without worrying about being questioned because the *politruk* had gone home for the night. The

stationmaster waited for us at the entrance to the station. She was an older woman in a railroader's uniform. She greeted us politely, and we went inside followed by the surprised stares of the other passengers who had to spend the night on the station's steps or on the lawns in front of it. She pointed to a bench on which we could put Kathy and left. The rest of us slept on the filthy floor. At six o'clock in the morning a cleaning woman kicked us out into the street. We breakfasted on bread and milk that we purchased from a woman in front of the station, extended our tickets in the ticket office and waited for the arrival of our train. At 8 o'clock the same NKVD *politruk* showed up. He inquired about how we slept and asked if we had transferred the flour. Again he asked (of course, incidentally and during small talk) about our backgrounds, where we were going and why. Obviously he must have reported on us to his superiors and they asked him to get some more detailed information.

Our train arrived at 10 o'clock. Again we went on the platform but this time the *provodnik* let us into the coach. There were a few passengers there. We sat on some benches toward one end of the coach and wondered whether or not Mr. Surgiel would get on the train. No sooner had the train started when he entered our coach. "I have to watch when that witch approaches to check tickets in order to have enough time to hide in the toilet," he said. The train stopped briefly at the railroad station Ulyanovsk II, right on the west bank of the Volga River. The *provodnik* walked through the coach and closed all of the windows warning the passengers not to open them until the train crosses the bridge and not to stand near them when the train crosses the bridge because the guards will shoot at them. The train moved slowly across the bridge. On the bridge armed soldiers with automatics at the ready stood every few yards. On both banks of the river there were camouflaged emplacements of antiaircraft guns and bunkers. The train stopped at a station on the east side of the Volga. "Well, only the Volga River is now between us and the Germans," my uncle remarked facetiously. The situation at the front was extremely serious. The Germans were approaching Stalingrad. While traveling down the river from Pavlovo to Ulyanovsk, we encountered boats full of wounded soldiers going up the river and boats full of soldiers and military hardware going down the river.

Our train entered some forests. It stopped several times at small stations where women and children sold wild strawberries, blueberries and mushrooms. We noticed a large number of NKVD troopers at each station. Later on when we were in Sergeyevka, we found out that there were many prison camps in those forests. The train stopped for a longer time in Melekess, a town built in the forest which consisted solely of wooden houses. The town's location was very picturesque and ... very convenient. In the winter, one had to walk only a few steps to get firewood. Throughout the trip, whenever the ticket checker approached our coach, Mr. Surgiel disappeared in the toilet.

After six hours on the train, we alighted at *Pogruznaya*, a relatively important railroad station because of the large grain elevator with its own siding standing not far from the station building. Behind the station were several wooden houses occupied by workers from the elevator. The fuel depot and a tractor shop were visible in the distance. The district town, *Koshki*, was located in a valley approximately 3 km from the station. Looking in the opposite direction, one could see three villages on the horizon. My uncle, who was familiar with this area from his initial visit, pointed out to us *Small Sergeyevka*, which one had to pass in order to reach our *Big Sergeyevka*, a *Mordovian* (one of the ethnic minorities in Central Russia) collective farm named "*Power of Work*" and a small village called *Ivanovka*. Between those villages were fields with not even an occasional tree or a clump of bushes, a typical monotonous steppe landscape.

The waiting room of the station was so crowded that we could hardly find any room for our belongings as well as for my aunt and Kathy. My uncle and Steve went into *Koshki* to phone *Big Sergeyevka* and have some wagons come to pick us up. Mr. Surgiel disappeared to find some onions. He had a stomach ache and "*onions are the best remedy for stomach ache*" he told my aunt. I was left to watch over the women and looked around the waiting room at passengers stretched out on benches or on their bundles. They were mostly evacuees from *Leningrad* (presently *St. Petersburg*), miserable exhausted people, pulled out of their sad environment and thrown into even a sadder one. Women and children from a big city, who knew the countryside only from movies and pictures, sent to work in villages. "*Who does not work does not eat.*" states Stalin's Constitution of 1935. "*We will produce more bread for the front!*" and "*Every grain is a bullet against the Germans!*" screamed slogans written with ink on pieces of newspaper and pasted on the walls of collective farm administration offices.

As I looked around at those future "agrarian workers," I spotted two women sitting on their bundles in one of the corners, obviously a mother and a daughter. The girl, maybe 15-16 years old, with big black eyes and a long black braid, frightfully skinny, was actually not sitting even for a moment but was constantly bringing food for the mother: bread, butter, milk, buttermilk and cucumbers, and feeding it to her. The mother could not have been more than 40 years old but looked every bit of 65 years, with leathery, dark skin, white hair and so awfully skinny that she resembled a skeleton covered tightly with skin. Looking at that woman I had the impression that under her skin there was nothing but bones and tendons; no muscles whatsoever, and I thought I was looking at Death. The only sign of any life were the woman's eyes, big and black like her daughter's but sunken in their sockets and full of terror; the eyes of a starved animal. My little cousin, Kathy, was frightened by the poor woman and relaxed only when the woman, after eating and drinking for an hour, stretched out on her bundles and fell asleep. Now it was the daughter's turn to eat. She ate slowly, taking large bites, chewing systematically as if with every bite she were trying to regain a little bit of the energy she had lost during her ordeal in the besieged and bombarded Leningrad.

Another family with decent suitcases sat next to us on carefully sewn sacks that contained their bedding. This family consisted of a grandmother, her daughter and granddaughter. They looked intelligent and interesting, so we started a conversation. They, like the others, were evacuated from Leningrad. The older woman's husband, a professor at the Leningrad University, had starved to death. She knew English perfectly and used to work in Petersburg's main post office before the Revolution. The daughter, *Tatyana Sergeyevna*, had a doctor's degree in geology and had participated in several scientific expeditions. Her husband, an associate professor in the Department of Mineralogy at Leningrad University, was somewhere at the front. *Tatyana Sergeyevna* had no idea where the *Raispolkom* in Koshki would assign them and decided to get an assignment to *Sergeyevka*. In the meantime my uncle and Steve returned from Koshki and we waited for the wagons which were to arrive any minute.

The distance between the station and *Sergeyevka* was 12 km (7.5 miles) and in about half-hour two wagons pulled up in front of the station. Two Polish youngsters, *Basil* and *Joe*, came to pick us up and were, of course, delighted to be of service. While their horses were resting, we talked with the two boys. *Joe* hailed from the environs of Warsaw and was here with his wife and a sister. His parents had come down with typhus and had died in the transport on the way from the North. His wife and sister had also become sick, and spent some time in a hospital in *Kuibyshev* (presently *Samara*) but pulled through. Although *Basil's* first name and surname were Ukrainian he was a Pole from the eastern part of the country. As a 17-year old boy he was shipped with his father, a forester, to a prison camp. When they were freed after the amnesty granted to polish exiles and traveled from the North, the father came down with typhus and died. "In the evening he became feverish," *Basil* told us. "And when I woke up in the morning, the cold corpse of my father was next to me. I left his body at the first station where some peasants offered to bury him."

When the horses rested and we were ready to go, it turned out that both our belongings and we would not fit in the two wagons. We decided, therefore, that my uncle, my aunt, Kathy and Steve would go this time with our belongings, while Mr. *Surgiel* and I would spend the night in the waiting room and go to *Sergeyevka* the following day when a wagon would arrive to pick us up. We loaded both wagons and they started toward the destination of our trip. I returned to the waiting room, had something for supper and talked with *Tatyana Sergeyevna*. *Surgiel* went to look for milk. He seemed to flood his gastrointestinal tract with milk. In their corner the mother and the daughter continued to eat, and every time I woke that night, the mother and her daughter were still eating in their corner of the waiting room.

In the evening the people in the waiting room started getting settled for the night. Again I had an opportunity to observe the admirable adaptability of the Russian people to the circumstances. Their luggage (if they had any!) was packed in such a way that the suitcases and bundles served as beds and pillows. Consequently, people could live for weeks in the waiting rooms of railroad stations waiting for their trains. This happened quite frequently and particularly at railroad junctions where people were known to wait 10-14 days for a connecting train. Of course, one had to spend all day in line at the ticket window in order to extend the ticket. When the train arrived, and if the person could not board it, the next day was spent again in line at the ticket window to extend the ticket and this continued until the day the passenger managed to get into a coach or most likely onto its roof.

The next morning my uncle and Steve arrived in a wagon drawn by a pair of horses. Mr. Surgiel placed his rucksack, which he had not wanted to send the previous day and guarded all night, in the wagon. Both Mr. Surgiel and I climbed into the wagon, and the four of us went to Koshki in order to send a cable to Mr. Dunin informing him that we had arrived in Sergeyevka. The two horses galloped like crazy. Mr. Surgiel who held the reins was unable to lead them at all. The wagon sounded like a tank on the hard road, clouds of dust rose from under its wheels and it shook so violently that our kidneys began to hurt as if they were bouncing inside of us.

Our wagon reached a hilltop and we could see Koshki down in the valley. We braced ourselves for the worst not knowing what to expect from our horses even though Surgiel tightened the reins as much as he possibly could. The wagon started downhill. Initially the two horses were braking the wagon but after a few yards it began accelerating and pushing against the horses' hind legs. They became frightened and took off down the hill like bats out of hell. None of Mr. Surgiel's efforts and know-how about handling horses bore any fruit. They seemed to fly like two *Pegasuses*. Passers-by, wagons and cows moved before our eyes like pictures in a kaleidoscope. All were getting out of the way.

The first houses of Koshki were already visible when we noticed that the road swerved to the left. Mr. Surgiel jerked the reins, the horses turned to the left sharply and the next moment we heard the sound of broken dishes. Our wagon stopped. It turned out that we had hit the nearest house breaking a few flowerpots on a window sill. Fortunately for us nobody was home, so we backed the wagon up and drove to the post office. After sending the cable and refreshing ourselves with some buttermilk bought in the market square, we started back to Sergeyevka. I looked around at Koshki: wooden houses except for the brick buildings housing the NKVD, the militia, the *Raispolkom*, a movie house and the waterworks. In the distance I also noticed hospital buildings.

We slowly climbed the hill leading out of Koshki and then our horses proceeded at a trot. It was noontime, the heat was oppressive, and it felt like molten iron was being poured down from the sun. Even our horses were not up to their tricks. We passed the railroad crossing and turned left. Now the horses moved at a faster trot, because they realized that they were returning home. For about 4 km (2½ miles) the road paralleled the railroad tracks, then it divided into two forks: the left one led to Yelshanka, a large village, the right one to Little Sergeyevka, a small village consisting of two parts separated by 3 km (2 miles). The name of the collective farm, "Bauer," indicated that it used to be inhabited by German colonists. We passed wooden houses which frequently had sheet metal roofs and trees growing around them. A lot of agricultural machinery near the stables was indicative of a well-managed village. We passed the two "Bauer" brigades and at a distance of 2-3 km (1¼-2 miles) saw *Big Sergeyevka*, a nice village with a windmill and a row of granaries.

Beyond the last cabin of Little Sergeyevka the road turned left and led down a steep hill toward two bridges. Surgiel loosened the reins and let the horses go. They shot across the two bridges like an arrow and effortlessly pulled us up the hill. After a few hundred yards and three turns of the road we stopped in front of the collective farm's stable. A stableman stepped up to unhitch the horses. The stable and neighboring buildings such as the farm's granaries, fire house, carpentry shop, the smithy, the administration building, as well as several mowers and harvesters attested to the wealth of the collective farm.

We walked toward our living quarters, about 200 yards from the stable. Passing the administration office I looked at the sign above the entrance which stated in Russian and in German "*Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm, Sergeyevka County, Koshki District, Kuibyshev Province.*" A wide street ran through the village with two-room cabins on both sides of it. The cabins had painted shutters and attached stables and granaries. Finally we arrived at the building designated to house the Polish invalids. Inside of it we were met by my aunt and Kathy full of news which they shared with us when we sat down to dinner. "*We were greeted very warmly by all the people. Both the school principal and the village mayor visited us and promised to lend us a load of firewood. The principal's mother offered to bake bread and do the laundry for us. The Polish women brought potatoes and vegetables.*" It was decided that Steve and Surgiel would work on the farm until the arrival of the first invalids when the two would become part of the Home's staff. I would immediately help my uncle with his work and my aunt with getting settled. Everything seemed to be beyond anyone's expectations! Too good to be true, especially in the Soviet Union. It turned out in due

course that the most difficult and most tragic times of our exile would be spent in Big Sergeyevka, and the job in the Home for Polish Invalids turned out to be a curse, which cost my uncle his life, ruined his wife's life and followed me like a ghost for the remaining four years of our stay in the Soviet Union. But everything looked perfect at first.

After dinner my uncle and I went to pay a visit on the school's principal and to borrow two or three beds from her. Before the Germans had been shipped into exile, the school ran a dormitory. Now the Germans were gone but the beds remained. The principal was an unmarried woman in her late thirties with a rather square unpleasant face with jaws like a boxer's. She braided her hair into two braids hanging on either side and framing her face. We also met the principal's mother, a pleasant old woman, and her sister *Vala*, a history teacher. Valya was 20 years old, had a pleasant face, two braids like her older sister and a nervous artificial laughter. We talked briefly with the three of them and then followed the school's janitress to a shed to get the beds. We picked one regular wooden bed sufficiently wide for my aunt and uncle and three plank beds: one for Steve who was to live with us, one for me and one to be kept in reserve for visitors to the Home like Mr. Dunin. We also found a small bed for Kathy. We brought our acquisitions home and unpacked the bedding.

The Home for Polish Invalids

Before it got dark my uncle and I went to inspect buildings which were assigned to the Home. One building, a wooden structure with a sheet metal roof, had two entrances: one led into a small hallway from which one could enter two large halls and our kitchen. From our kitchen there was a door to a large room. The other entrance to the building led to a 6 x 6 foot hallway from which one could enter a hall which connected with one of the previously mentioned halls and a 6 x 5 foot cubicle. We decided that this building would house our living quarters and the sleeping quarters of the inmates. The small cubicle would serve as a storage space. The second building, approximately 50 yards distant from the first one, was very dilapidated and housed a kitchen with a big Russian oven. One entered the kitchen directly from the outside. Behind the kitchen were two rooms, one after the other. A door from this last room led to a 3 x 3 foot hallway with two more doors: one to the outside and the other one to a room occupied by a Russian woman. We decided that this building would serve as the dining hall. After having made these decisions we returned home for our supper, which consisted of soup, hot water with milk (called *Bavarka* in my father's family) and bread.

We had not even had a chance to finish our supper when our first guest paid us a visit and arrived at a very opportune moment. We were just talking about "making contacts" with the local tractor brigade in order to get some kerosene for our lamp and our small kerosene stove for which we had bartered Kathy's old dresses while still in the "Red Star" collective farm, when a *tarantas*, a low four-wheeled carriage made of wicker placed on a wooden chassis, pulled up in front of the house. It was already dark so we could not see who alighted from the *tarantas* but after a short while the doors to the kitchen flew open and a man's booming voice asked: "May I come in?" "*Milosti prosim*" (Please, come in.) my uncle answered with the usual Russian hospitable greeting. A whiff of air told us our guest was a tractor driver. "Good evening," he said as he entered the room. "Good evening. Please sit down." we answered in unison.

Our guest was a giant of a man approximately 6'4" tall with an unusually small head for his size. The conversation went smoothly and from his manner of speech we recognized that he was a Ukrainian. His name was *Ivan Ivanovich Shulin* and like all Russians he was curious about us: where were we from? who were we? why were we here? what were we going to do?. He also talked about himself. Pressed into military service in 1941, he was taken prisoner by the Germans near a village. His two captors ordered him to dig a grave for himself. He had not finished the job when the Red Army counterattacked in order to retake the village. The Germans decided to execute him anyway but they were so frightened by the counterattack that they shot at him without aiming, threw him in the shallow grave, barely covered him with dirt and ran away. It turned out that one of the Germans missed and the second one hit Shulin in the foot. After a few minutes he recovered from the pain, pushed aside the thin layer of dirt and crawled out of his grave. Fortunately for Shulin the Red Army unit retook the village, found him and shipped him to a hospital. After several months when his wound healed, he was sent for R & R and then to work in the Pogrznaya Tractor Shop where he was assigned to the "Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm." *And so I was already in my grave and am again among the living!*" Shulin remarked with a twinkle in his eyes.

An hour passed by and we could not guess the purpose of his unexpected visit. We were quite certain, however, that just meeting us was not his ultimate goal. Well, we did not have to wait very long to satisfy our curiosity. "*You probably have vodka because you just arrived. I am dying for a half-liter (approximately a pint). I will give you cash or kerosene. Whatever you prefer.*" We preferred kerosene. Shulin put the half-liter bottle of vodka into the pocket of his pants and promised to bring us the kerosene immediately and in his own vessel because we had no suitable one. My aunt and Kathy went to sleep. My uncle and I waited for Shulin's return. He returned after an hour with a 15-liter container of kerosene and with ... the chairman of the collective farm, *Stepan Sergeyevich*, who looked exactly the way my uncle had described him upon returning to "Red Star" after his initial visit to Sergeyevka. Stepan Sergeyevich was extremely polite and pleasant, had a goatee and a shaved head. Again we carried on the conventional conversation which camouflaged the real purpose of the chairman's late night visit: another half-liter bottle of vodka. He promised to give us a requisition for two kilograms (4 pounds) of honey in exchange the next day. Way after midnight the two of us went to sleep richer by kerosene and the promised honey, and full of new impressions.

The days rolled by. Steve and Surgiel started working in the collective farm. Steve lived with us, and Surgiel lived with one of the Polish families. My uncle used to travel to Koshki from time to time with the farmers who carted grain to the elevator. I wandered around the village visiting Polish families, checking their living conditions and registering the children under 16 years of age who would be eligible to use the facilities of a day care center which the Embassy planned to establish at the Home for Polish Invalids. The Polish families in Sergeyevka lived under extremely hard conditions.

One family consisted of a mother and five children. The mother and the two older children worked in the fields. The 10-year old girl prepared the family's meals and looked after the two little ones. In another family the mother and her two sons worked. A 14-year old daughter, just released from the hospital after a bout with typhus, had no strength and could not even sit up. She just laid motionless outside and seemed to enjoy the fresh air. The 8-year old boy kept the house. In this family, the *Kowalskis*, the husband and another two daughters had gotten lost somewhere during their trip south from the northern parts of the country. At one of the stations they had left the train to get bread and missed the train's departure. In the third family only the mother worked while three underage boys, one of whom had tuberculosis, stayed home. "Sir," the mother told me. *"I had six of them. When we traveled from Vologda (a region in the Russian Far North), three died on the way. I could not keep the body in the car, so I held it in my arms standing on the brakeman's little platform until someone took it from me to bury. In this manner I lost three of them during that hellish trip."*

The two remaining families, Joe's and the *Zelmanskis*, were well off because their men were with them. Joe was in charge of the farm's stable. The *Zelmanskis* had brought with them a bicycle, a large wall clock, a sewing machine and several trunks full of things. They had a son and a daughter. A second daughter had contracted typhus and died in a hospital in *Ulyanovsk*. Mrs. *Zelmanska* constantly cried about the deceased *Sabina*, while her husband growled that *"A bolt of lightning should strike you for that constant crying."* The gossipy Mrs. *Kowalska* claimed that Joe's family and the *Zelmanskis* had plenty of clothes, only "she and the others were poor." The *Zelmanskis* and Joe claimed the same about the others. And so, as the Russians used to say "one could not thresh it out without a half-liter (a pint of vodka, of course!)."

There was another Polish family in the village which consisted of two brothers 18 and 13 years old and a 15-year old sister. They had arrived in Sergeyevka in February 1942, the first Polish family to settle in that village. Upon their arrival the mother and the two younger children came down with typhus. They were taken to a hospital in nearby *Gavrilovka* where the mother died. When the whole family had been in a settlement in the north their father, a tailor by profession, was arrested for openly expressing anti Soviet feelings and imprisoned. Since that time they had lost contact with him. When I went to see them I arrived in the midst of a family scene. The older brother who, as it turned out later, was quite stupid, fussed over the soup which was not salty enough and, consequently, had hit his sister. When I arrived she was crying in one corner of the room while the younger boy was crying in the opposite corner. I calmed them down as best I could and looked around. They lived in atrocious conditions. Their clothes were in tatters and they slept on straw. All three of them, *Sam*, *Roza* and *David* worked on the collective farm. That evening over supper our family talked about the terrible poverty among the Poles in the Soviet Union because the living conditions in our village were undoubtedly similar to those all over the country. We could not even imagine what it cost the Polish government to keep those hundreds of thousands of their citizens alive. Because, in an overwhelming majority of cases their earnings would just suffice for a meager existence and could not possibly cover the cost of the most basic clothing. Shortly after we came to Sergeyevka a truck arrived in *Petrovka*, a village about 18 km (11 miles) distant from Sergeyevka, with "goodies" from the Polish Embassy. Mr. Dunin asked my uncle to come that Saturday to Koshki where they would be picked up by a wagon from Petrovka. We asked Stepan Sergeyevich, the chairman of the collective farm, to permit the Poles to take a wagon for the trip to Petrovka. He agreed because "his Poles" were the best workers on the farm. My uncle left for Koshki on foot on Friday and planned to return the following Monday.

In the meantime, Tatyana Sergeyevna and her family, whom we had met in the waiting room in Pogruznaya, arrived in our village. So, we had an acquaintance. Also our circle of local people, whom we got to know, became enlarged. Aunt Ala, the mother of the school principal, used to stop by a few times during the day in case we needed anything. Nina, the school's janitress, used to spend long hours with

my aunt. She was a young woman with two little children. Her husband, who was an NKVD officer at a prison camp before the war, was at the front. She could barely support herself on a serviceman's family pay of 180 *rubles* a month plus 50 *rubles* for the two children. The older child had no clothes at all and ran around totally naked, the younger one who was still breast fed and suffered from rickets, was wrapped in a piece of a torn blanket. The only clothes Nina owned were an old skirt and a blouse which she wore with nothing underneath.

One day a young good looking Russian woman with a very pretty four year old boy stopped by our house. *"I came to meet you as new neighbors."* she said. *"My name is Lisa, and I would also like to ask you whether you have any aspirin because my sister's child is sick."* We gave her some aspirin and it turned out that her sister, Raya, lived just across the street from our dining hall. Lisa was a teacher. *"Visit us at the windmill. My mother-in-law will be so happy to meet you."* Lisa said as she was leaving. It just so happened that we had finished our supply of flour and wanted to have the grain we brought from the "Red Star Collective Farm" ground into flour and since the next day was a windy one, I went to the mill. The miller's wife, Aunt Masha, greeted me very cordially. We talked briefly because I was in a hurry to get back, so Aunt Masha ground the grain and asked me to come with my aunt. *"You look so much like my son, Paul. Come and visit us."* she said as we parted. I promised to come for a visit as soon as we got settled.

On Sunday the Poles from Sergeyevka went to Petrovka with a wagon. They returned the same evening loaded with various items. Steve brought for us a sleeping bag full of things. We unloaded the received treasures: two sleeping bags, which were actually bed sheets sewn together to form a sack which was packed with straw and could serve as a straw mattress, two dresses for my aunt and two for Kathy, and a pair of shoes with rubber soles for each of them as well. My uncle, Steve and I received khaki military pants, sweaters and shirts. There was also soap, lard, sugar, condensed milk, two warm hospital robes and socks.

My uncle returned on Monday tired and with an upset stomach. He related what had happened since his departure the previous Friday. *"When I arrived at the inn, called the 'Home of the Collective Farmer,' in Koshki, Mr. Dunin was already there. He handed me a telegram requesting that I come to the Embassy in order to discuss matters pertaining to the Home for Polish Invalids. We went to the militia office where I applied for a travel pass which they promised to issue to me within a few days. We had dinner in the dining room of the inn. The dinner consisted of watery cabbage soup and a few pieces of gristle as the 'entree.' In the evening we went to see a movie. The night in the inn was a nightmare because bedbugs bit us mercilessly. Saturday morning a wagon driven by Mr. Dunin's acquaintance came to pick us up. Upon our arrival in Petrovka we stopped at the home of the Sznycer family."*

Mr. Dunin had known the Sznycers from Melekess where the family settled after the August 1941 amnesty. In November of that year they arrived in Petrovka and moved in with a local German farmer. When the Germans were resettled a month later, the Sznycers *'inherited'* a beautiful cabin, a cow, a dog, a cellar full of potatoes and a year's supply of firewood. After a short time the collective farm took away the cow, but the Sznycers continued to live very well. While still in the camp, they used to receive parcels from relatives left behind in *Bialystok*. Among many other things the parcels contained leather and slabs of bacon, both extremely valuable items in the Soviet Union. The oldest brother, Saul, was married and had a small child. He worked as the village fireman. The job was an easy one, because Saul had nothing to do all day long except to be on duty in 'the firehouse,' a hut in which the fire equipment, consisting of a hook and ladder wagon and a pumper, was kept. The middle brother, Nathan, who picked us up in Koshki, ferried grain to the elevator or sheaves of grain to the threshing machine. When he stopped home for breakfast or lunch, he would leave a sheaf or two, or pour off some grain and then manage to finagle things at the elevator so that the weight delivered was equal to that shipped by the collective farm. The third brother, Isaac, finished high school when his family was in the labor camp. He was a *'crazy philosopher,'* who did not work but kept in touch with the Polish Embassy and it was he who brought the shipment from Kuibyshev on a tractor shop's truck driven by a Pole. The Sznycers served such variety of food that I ended up with diarrhea. The distribution of the goods started Sunday morning and lasted all day. People were yelling and shoving. None was satisfied with what and how much they got. There were more than 200 Poles in the district and every person received a minimum of two items of clothing in addition to soap and fat. People threatened to complain to the NKVD and to the Polish Embassy. Mr.

Dunin was all upset and swore like a sailor. Late in the evening the distribution ended, and on Monday morning Nathan Sznycer drove us to the Pogruznaya train station."

After his return from Petrovka my uncle spent a few days resting. The Poles from our village started coming in with complaints that they had been wronged during the distribution of goods. We tried to mollify them by explaining that it would have been much worse if they had not gotten anything. They agreed in principle but felt wronged just the same. Several days later my uncle was notified that his pass to Kuibyshev was ready. He took a rucksack with a loaf of bread, a small jar of clarified butter and two bars of soap which he had brought from Petrovka for the sole purpose of "being able to buy a train ticket and to stop the train." He claimed that because of war shortages in the Soviet Union "a bar of soap placed on the railroad track would stop a train" (since the engineer would want to pick it up!). It was August 20th or 21st when my uncle marched off to the Pogruznaya train station. The trip to Kuibyshev was exhausting, a distance of some 700 km (about 440 miles) with a transfer at *Chisma Junction*. He planned to return with the Polish truck driver from Petrovka who was also supposed to be in Kuibyshev (presently *Samara*) at the same time.

After my uncle's departure for Kuibyshev where all the embassies were located at that time, my aunt, Kathy and I went to visit the miller's wife. The family lived in a nicely furnished cabin next to the windmill. Aunt Masha and Lisa received us very warmly. Immediately the *samovar* was started and delicacies such as honey, white rolls, homemade cookies and hard candy (Lisa worked as accountant in the *Selpo*) were placed on the table covered with a white linen tablecloth. They asked about Poland, about the way we had lived before the war and about our experiences in the Soviet Union. In turn they told us about themselves. As a young girl, Aunt Masha used to be a maidservant in a German household in Koshki. When she married Uncle Peter, they bought this windmill, which had been in ruins. Uncle Peter had to rebuild it from scratch, but in 1930-1931 during collectivization, the collective farm took over the mill, and now Uncle Peter was earning "work days" like any other member of the collective. He continued to watch over the mill and repair it, as if it still were his own.

The miller was mobilized for the "Work Front" and worked in *Bezimianka*, a suburb of Kuibyshev, where the giant factories geared for war needs were located. The working conditions in those plants were horrendous. Uncle Peter suffered from a lung condition and the collective farm had petitioned to have him demobilized as an "irreplaceable worker." The millers also had three children. The oldest son, Paul, Lisa's husband, was a journalist by training. In 1939 he was stationed in *Ciechanow*, in the Polish part of present *Belarus*, where Lisa and their son were able to be with him. She returned to Sergeevka with the child for the summer while her husband, then a captain in the Red Army, remained. When the Soviet-German war broke out, he retreated with the routed Red Army, his unit surrounded by German armies advancing on Moscow. Paul suffered elbow and hip wounds and after two months his unit was finally able to fight its way out of the German encirclement. After recuperating from his wounds, Paul was promoted to major, decorated with the *Order of the Red Star* Order and assigned as a war correspondent of *Pravda* to the staff of *Gen. Rokossovsky*. Of course, he was a member of the Communist Party, and this did not sit well either with Aunt Masha or with Uncle Peter.

The family had had no news from their younger son, *Vanya*, since August of 1941. Two months before the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and the Soviet Union, Vanya got married, lived with his bride for three days and then was assigned to an army post in Estonia. In the beginning of August a letter came from a field post office and then all traces of the boy disappeared.

The youngest of the millers' three children was a nineteen-year old daughter, *Nina*, who for the past several months had worked at a factory in *Chapayevsk* located not too far from Kuibyshev. Like millions of other girls throughout the country she was mobilized for work in the factories, and now *Ninotchka* (as her mother called her) was sending downcast letters. Aunt Masha's heart was bleeding for the girl and she tried to make her life easier by mailing parcels and money to her. "There were so many of us in the house," Aunt Masha was saying. "It was so gay. Vanya and Ninotchka would laugh all day and now I am left here alone. Thank God at least Lisa and Vovochka are here." Vovochka was Lisa's and Paul's very attractive four-year old son. When asked about his father, the boy used to say: "My Papa is fighting the Germans. When he comes back he will bring me a 'nagan.'" (a Russian service revolver).

As we sat at the table, Lisa took a guitar of the wall and, softly strumming some Gypsy ballad, talked about herself. She hailed from Ulyanovsk where her father used to be a rich merchant. Although there were ten children in the family, they lived comfortably until the October Revolution. When the Soviet regime came to power, Lisa's future and that of her siblings was sealed. Their father was a merchant, therefore, an enemy of the working class who supposedly bled the peasants and workers to death. That was the time when Lisa's father went to work on the Volga River as a *batrak* doing the heaviest physical labor, carrying heavy loads, pulling barges, etc. In this manner he purged himself of his old sins and his children were permitted to study. Eventually all graduated from institutions of higher learning.

It became dark outside, and Lisa was still strumming the guitar and humming softly when we got up to leave. "*When Ninochka returns*," Aunt Masha remarked. "*She will play and sing for you. She is an expert (ona masteritsa)! And now I will accompany you home.*" We stepped outside into the warm evening air. How pleasantly and rapidly the time had passed in the millers' clean, whitewashed home. How different these people were from any we had met thus far. Intuitively I felt close to these individuals who, although living well, were just as unhappy as the rest of the Russian people. During all of my life my first impressions of people have never failed me. We lived in Sergeyevka for the remainder of our stay in the Soviet Union; i.e. three years and seven and one-half months. We went through some of the most difficult, most trying and most tragic times and had the threat of prison camps hanging over our heads for three of those years. There were many victims during that period. Many Poles were incarcerated again and not released until as late as 1956. Some, if they are still alive, must be rotting in the prisons and camps of the *Gulag* even now. The Sergeyevka Poles also paid their price to the "Bolshevik justice system" in the form of three innocent people. During each mishap and tragic moment that unexpectedly happened to us, the miller's family stood by us and with us. Other people, even old and supposedly devoted friends, shunned us. Aunt Masha, her husband and their daughter, Ninochka, were "true friends indeed" whenever we were in need.

We arrived at home. Aunt Masha carefully examined the things which we had received in Petrovka and expressed an interest in purchasing a robe. Since we had no place to get milk, Aunt Masha offered to give us milk in exchange for the robe. Now I do not recall for how much milk the robe was bartered but bringing milk from the mill became one of my daily duties. The other one was going to the local post office. A driver who was assigned from one of the collective farms for one year brought the mail from Koshki around noontime. Many young girls, who served as letter carriers from the villages served by this post office, were already waiting for the driver at our post office. As soon as he/she arrived it became terribly crowded at the counter. Some women were waiting for letters from their husbands or other family members serving at the front. Others waited for newspapers. When the postmistress opened the sack with the mail and emptied it on the counter, everyone's eyes were fixed on the paper triangles emerging from the mail sack and piling up on the counter. I must point out that in the Soviet Union at that time an envelope was an extremely rare item. Letters were written on one side of a page torn out of a notebook and then the page was folded in such a way that it formed a closed triangle. The address was written on one side of the triangle. When there was no paper handy, letters were written on old bills, on pages torn from books or on pieces of newspaper pages, on whatever paper was available. Official letters, for example from Party *Raispolkom* or *Raikom* to county offices and collective farm managements, were always sealed in "envelopes" extemporaneously made out of a newspaper page.

After emptying the sack the postmistress sorted out the mail. Those present received on the spot letters and newspapers addressed to them. The letter carriers recorded the registered letters in their logbooks, picked up the money orders, the rest of their village's mail and left. We expected both mail forwarded from our previous address as well as a parcel from our acquaintances in *Sverdlovsk*, so I visited the post office daily. This way I became friends with the postmistress, *Tosya*. She was a young woman, a close friend of Vala, the school principal's sister. Frequently, I visited the post office after office hours just to listen to the two girls playing their guitars and singing. Both played very well and harmonized beautifully when they sang.

During my stay in the Soviet Union I came to the conclusion that Russians must be the most musically inclined people in Europe. Every girl played the guitar. Almost every boy or man played the *balalaika* or the accordion. It seemed when a couple of people got together for some fun, immediately a chorus formed. Various voices automatically harmonized and the song sounded completely different from

the same song being sung by a non Russian chorus. Vala and Tosya had an inexhaustible repertoire of folk and military songs, sentimental ballads and songs about heroism, and of an immense number of *chastushki*, i.e. four line stanzas sung by two persons taking turns which was like a conversation set to a melody. The singing of the *chastushki* was combined with a dance because after each stanza the singer performed a few dance steps characteristic of a Russian folk dance. My acquaintanceship with Tosya had another advantage: access to newspapers and, consequently, to news no matter how meager or biased.

Every day the reports of the Soviet Information Bureau listed the names of places taken by the Germans or retaken by the Red Army. It was impossible to get a handle on the war situation by reading the Soviet newspapers. One could only deduce that fighting was going on near the Volga River around *Stalingrad* (presently known as *Volograd*), in the *Kuban* and on the approaches to the *Caucasus*. Only the large number of people evacuated from Stalingrad and former Leningrad inhabitants evacuated again, but this time from the Kuban, attested to the extremely serious situation at the front. According to stories told by the evacuees from Stalingrad, Germans were in the city and the giant Stalingrad Tractor Works had been razed to the ground. The farmers sent by the collective farm on business to Kuibyshev brought back reports of *Luftwaffe* raids on Bezimianka, Chapayevsk and other nearby industrial cities. No wonder, because Kuibyshev had become a temporary capital of the Soviet Union. All of the *Narkomaty* (ministries), foreign embassies and legations moved there from Moscow, where Stalin remained to direct the defense of the city and the activities of the Red Army. Our district newspaper, "*The Volga Commune*," never printed a single word about any bombing raids.

Every morning when I came to pick up the milk, Aunt Masha cried her eyes out. "*They will kill my Petya! They will kill Ninochka! And Ivan is missing in action I will remain alone in my old age!*" One morning when I came into the room with an empty clay pot for milk, I noticed a young girl sitting at the table and having breakfast. She wore a house robe made of white flannel with a small flower pattern. Aunt Masha came out of the kitchen beaming and seemed ten years younger. She greeted me and, turning to the girl, said: "*Ninochka, this is Mike. I told you about him. Get acquainted.*" I extended my hand and introduced myself. The girl jumped up from her chair, extended her hand, curtsied, looked up since I was much taller than she, and whispered "*Nina.*"

Aunt Masha immediately poured me a glass of tea and asked me to join the two of them at the table. My excuses that I had already had breakfast were of no use. I had to sit down and drink tea. Frankly, I rather liked the idea. Ninochka was somewhat embarrassed because her robe was slightly ripped at one sleeve. I pretended not to have noticed it. We sat and talked in generalities about our schooling, about literature and about the German language. Nina had finished nine grades, but the outbreak of the war prevented her from finishing the last (tenth) grade. She was fluent in German because Sergeyevka had been inhabited by Germans and the school was German. We had exchanged a few words in that language when Aunt Masha called from the kitchen: "*Ninochka! Sing a German song for Mike.*" "*Mother, please hand me the guitar,*" Nina asked her mother. She did not want to move on account of the rip in her house robe. I got up from the table, took the guitar off the wall and handed the instrument to Nina. She thanked me, touched the string as if trying to recall a song and started playing.

It was the familiar tune of an old German song about a man who was returning home from a trip. The road took him through a forest where he was assaulted by highway men. Nina had a strong pleasant voice. As she played the guitar and sang I took my time observing her. She had pretty, small hands and narrow fingers with which she lightly and casually touched the strings. She was somewhat plump but had a very pleasant face with a perked up nose, large eyes and a dimple in each cheek. The song about the highway men was followed by two Gypsy ballads: "*Dark Eyes*" and "*My Campfire.*" I would have stayed longer if Kathy had not arrived announcing that the "milk was needed for dinner." I did not feel like leaving but got up, said goodbye and invited Nina and Lisa to visit us. At home Kathy promptly reported to her mother that "*Aunt Masha's daughter has returned home.*"

That afternoon Lisa and Ninochka came to visit us and we talked until dusk. It turned out that Nina had escaped from the plant in Chapayevsk. In the official language she "deserted from the Work Front" and now was afraid of the consequences: a trial and five years at hard labor in a prison camp. "*I could not take it anymore.*" She told me with tears in her pretty eyes. In a short time Nina and I became truly close friends. We understood each other completely.

A few days later, the long awaited mail from the "Red Star Collective Farm" arrived: a few letters from various acquaintances and a parcel, but no note from our friends in Sverdlovsk. There was no letter from Iggi, who served in Gen. Anders' Polish Army as a lieutenant, either. The absence of letters might have looked suspicious, but we did not consider it unusual or disturbing. *"With all their mess and inefficiency the Soviets must have lost his letter."* I remarked offhandedly as my aunt was unpacking the parcel. It contained men's shirts, trousers and some dresses.

Meanwhile, Steve and I became frequent guests in the miller's household. We spent hours there telling them about our previous lives in Poland, while Ninochka and Lisa listened openmouthed, and Aunt Masha remarked: *"Eh, Ninochka, for you it sounds like fairy tales but I remember well how we lived before the revolution of 1917."* The women, in turn, told us about their lives in Sergeyevka with the German settlers and to us those stories also seemed like fairy tales. On the basis of their stories I was able to piece together the following picture of the life in our part of the county which included Little and Big Sergeyevka as well as Yodlovka, a village located 6 km (about 4 miles) on the other side of the railroad track. It should be noted that at a distance of 2 km (1¼ mile) from our village was a spot where two trains traveling in opposite direction could pass by each other. Otherwise the railroad line was a single track. Sergeyevka, just like the other "colonies," a name given to the German villages by the Russians, was very rich. The county chairman as well as the manager of the collective farm used to be German. The only Russian family was that of the miller. There were also three Chuvash families: the Grigoryevs, descendants of a *kulak*, the *Travins* and *Uncle Stepan* with his blind wife.

The collective farm was so well managed and its harvests so big that the farmers were earning 6-8 kg (13-18 pounds) of grain per "workday". During harvesting and threshing, Tartars were hired as additional laborers and they used to earn 20-30 kg (45-65 pounds) of grain daily. Nobody worked on Sundays or holidays. The farmers used to visit Yodlovka because the "Yodlovka Germans" had a brass band. Twice a month that band and those wishing to have a good time came by truck to Sergeyevka. During the week after work the young people used to gather on the shore of the lake with balalaikas, guitars and accordions. They sang and danced until dawn. There were many fruit trees throughout the village and each cabin had a garden and flower beds.

This idyll lasted until December 1941 when orders came to resettle the German colonists. They were given a few days to get ready for the move. Their cows were appropriated by the collective farm, and the owners were told that they would receive new cows wherever they end up. Pigs and fowl were slaughtered and salted for the trip. The people even took their kitchen stoves with them. And then one cold December day thousands of people, the descendants of those German colonists who had been brought to Russia approximately two centuries before by Catherine the Great and, who during those years had contributed to the economic, cultural and political growth of the country, were exiled irrespective of their age, sex or political affiliation; Communist Party members or members of its youth arm, the *Komsomol*, shared the same fate as all of the others. Only those German women whose husbands were Russian or who belonged to some other ethnic group remained. Their children remained with them. There were none of them in our village, but in Yodlovka a few of these single women remained. Many exiled families left various things with Aunt Masha to be sold with instructions that the money be forwarded to the owners. Thanks to exiling of the Germans, the families which remained in the village and the Chuvash population of the neighboring villages bought a lot of pots, plates, milk separators, etc. and became better off.

After several weeks letters began to arrive from the people who were resettled. Some were in the north and others were in Kazakhstan. All of them lived in terrible conditions; in mud huts and burrows. The former chairman of the collective farm worked as a night watchman on a Kazakh collective farm, the village mayor transported water to an animal farm (how well I knew that job!), his daughter, a very close friend of Ninochka, learned to be a tractor driver, because she could earn more money driving a tractor, and the family had no news about a son who was separated from them. The people who remained behind were deeply shaken by the fate of their friends and neighbors. *"Cursed be our regime. They destroyed such good people!"* was heard over and over again.

My uncle returned from Kuibyshev on Friday by truck belonging to the tractor shop and driven by a

Polish driver. The truck was in the city on business and the driver, just as he had always done in the past, stopped at the Embassy to find out whether or not there was anything for the district. In Koshki my uncle and the driver were joined by Mr. Dunin who had been notified about a transport of goods for the district, by Mrs. Dunin and a friend of theirs. Now they all descended on us. My aunt prepared dinner; my uncle opened some canned goods purchased in the Embassy's commissary, a bottle of *Moskovskaya* vodka and a bottle of Port wine. Kathy received a bar of English chocolate, and we smoked *Wings* as well as some Iranian cigarettes.

After dinner Lisa and Nina stopped in because they had seen the truck and wanted to know whether or not my uncle had returned from Kuibyshev. They joined us at the table awfully pleased to be in the company of the "*Polish Representative*," whom everybody treated with deference. Mr. Dunin was a quiet older gentleman, a former forester from the environs of *Lomza*. He made a very positive impression on me. His wife surpassed him in erudition and social graces, having been the daughter of a well-known Warsaw lawyer. The Dunins had two sons, who had escaped through a window when both parents were being arrested in February 1940. Since that time there had been no trace of the boys. There was nothing worth mentioning about the Dunins' friend except maybe that he was vigorously flirting with Lisa and so terribly mutilating the Russian language that the whole scene was simply hilarious. My uncle was talking about his visit at the Embassy, about some of the staff, and about the food, but he did it in a rather haphazard and boring way which was so uncharacteristic of my uncle, an otherwise witty and wonderful story teller. It was obvious to me that he was withholding something and just could not wait for our guests to leave. When the two of us found ourselves alone in the kitchen in order to open a bottle of beer, he whispered: "*I have news that will make your hair stand on end.*" Finally around six o'clock our guests got up to leave. The driver picked out whatever things he wanted, because the Embassy had had told my uncle to give him *carte blanche*. Mr. Dunin had to escort his wife to Koshki, as well as to notify the other villages that the distribution of goods would take place on Sunday. Finally, the guests left.

When we were alone my uncle started telling us about his visit to the Embassy. That night we sat up until 3 o'clock in the morning listening to the news, and the news was bad. The situation of the Poles in the Soviet Union was beginning to deteriorate for a number of reasons. The main one was the evacuation of Polish Army units to Iran. This army, commanded by Gen. Anders, consisted of 6 divisions, approximately 100,000 men. The Soviet High Command demanded that this force be sent into action immediately and on the most endangered part of the front; namely, the Stalingrad sector. The Polish Government in London, Gen. Sikorski, the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces as well as the General Staff, were against the Soviets' demand and rightly so. Due to the lack of military hardware the Polish soldiers were insufficiently trained and such orders would lead to a massacre of the 100,000 men. The feeling was that Poland could not afford the loss of so many men and, consequently, the adverse effect on the birthrate of an already decimated Polish population. Those political considerations were not stated officially but were certainly important. Therefore, following discussions in the Kemlin, and with the support of the Allied High Command, Gen. Anders evacuated the Polish Armed Forces in the USSR to Iran where they were incorporated into the Allied Forces in the Middle East.

Another reason for the deterioration of the Polish-Soviet relationship was the constant inquiries sent to the *Narkomindiel* (National Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, equivalent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) by the Polish Embassy about the over 8000 Polish officers who had not reported to Polish Army units. The Soviet Government's reaction to these events was most unexpected. One day the offices of the Polish Embassy representatives all over the Soviet Union were closed, the representatives and their staffs imprisoned and the warehouses containing clothes and food sent by Great Britain and the U.S.A., and worth millions of *rubles* sealed. To a note of the Polish Embassy protesting this action, the *Narkomindiel* responded that the "representatives of the Embassy and their staffs engaged in espionage." It is worth mentioning that all of those individuals were arrested on the same day all over the Soviet Union and were treated identically in every prison. On the 90th day of their incarceration the attitude of the prison authorities toward them visibly improved and on the 100th day they were informed by their investigating judges that the "Moscow Three Tribunal" had convicted them *in absentia* as spies and sentenced them to expulsion from the territory of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, several people drew 5-10 year prison sentences. While staying in the Embassy's dormitory my uncle had met some of those sentenced to exile.

However, the most surprising encounter happened to him on the train between Chishna and Kuibyshev where he met the friends who had sent us a parcel from Chelabinsk, and it became clear why we had had no communication from them except for the parcel. It turned out that the wife had worked as the Embassy Representative's secretary and had been imprisoned for 100 days. Her husband, who had worked as the warehouse manager, was constantly being watched by the NKVD and did not want to endanger us by writing to us. When my uncle met them on the train, he immediately recognized *Henryk*, but could not believe his eyes when he saw how the imprisonment had changed his wife. Although her head was not shaved as in many prisons, during interrogation she was repeatedly hit between her eyes with the handle of a revolver. When she passed out, cold water was poured over her face to bring her back to consciousness and the beating continued until they finally fractured the bone in her nose. While the basic interrogation methods used on Polish prisoners were ordered by Moscow, deviations did occur in some regions of the country. In some prisons the heads of both men and women were shaved, while in others they were not. One Embassy representative was permitted to have food parcels brought to him from outside with no limit set on the amount. Consequently, his wife used to bring him so much food that he was able to feed the other prisoners in his cell, 10 people altogether.

Another representative was placed in solitary confinement. For the second interrogation he was taken to a dark room in which the three NKVD officers-interrogators were illuminated by two candelabras. He was forced to sit on the edge of a stool with no back support for 20 hours with his hands hanging down. The man announced that he had nothing more to say, that any further taking him out of his cell would be totally pointless, and he requested some reading material. The officers kept him for a few more hours in that pose which was so characteristic of NKVD interrogations, then returned him to his cell and had the requested reading material delivered to him. He was not taken out of his cell any more but on the 100th day the verdict was read to him, and he was released.

A representative in the *Kirov* district was accused of espionage because at one time he "expressed an interest in the local electric power plant." It seemed that one evening he took a walk with a Russian woman. When they passed a brightly lit new building, he had asked whether it was a club. She told him that it was the new municipal electric power station. Well, during the investigation the NKVD even made use of *ochna stavka*, a situation where the defendant faced that woman who only confirmed the accusation. *Ochna stavka* was used in every case. Poles, regardless of their position in the Embassy Representative's office, as well as other people without any ties to the office at all, had accusers confirm that "yes, he/she collected information, spied, etc."

In another case the investigating NKVD officer opened a cupboard and showed the defendant all kinds of canned goods and items of clothing which he, the defendant, had given as favors to various Soviet officials. The officer knew exactly when, under what circumstances and to whom a particular item had been given. All those sentenced to exile arrived at the Polish Embassy where they were given passports and then they received Soviet exit visas from the *Narkomindiel* (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs). The Embassy provided them with clothing and money for the trip, and after a few days they left for Iran.

The reprisals of the Soviet government were not limited to the liquidation of the Embassy Representatives' offices. Although the position of the Trustees was not liquidated, a representative of the *Narkomindiel* informed the Embassy's Secretary that every newly appointed Trustee must have the approval of the *Narkomindiel*. Some of the old Trustees were considered by the Soviet government to be "disloyal and hostile toward the Soviet State." Mr. Dunin and Mr. Kochanski, the Trustee in Melekess, were among them and within a few weeks they were relieved of their duties. Since the political situation became muddled, we realized that we would encounter tremendous difficulties in our work. In the meantime, however, everything was going smoothly.

In the Embassy my uncle met with the Third Secretary, Counselor Fejd, and with the Director of the Social Welfare Department, Counselor M., who acquainted him with the plans for the future Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans. It was to house 200 people, both adults and children. The full time staff was to consist of 10 people; consequently capable invalids were to be used for light work. The names of the invalids and children would be submitted by the representatives of individual villages and districts; Mr.

Kochanski's jurisdiction included four districts in addition to ours. In the Home several spaces were to be reserved for Poles working on collective farms who could come for a week's rest. The Soviet authorities promised to supply provisions for 200 people at government prices and in rations equal to those in Soviet homes for invalids. The Embassy would supply clothing and additional foodstuffs such as fats, condensed milk, rice, beans and sugar which were sent from England and the U.S.

The idea was beautiful, and it would have permitted hundreds of thousands of the Poles remaining in the Soviet Union to survive the exile. Unfortunately, constant chicanery and hindrances by the Soviet authorities motivated by politics and the world situation did not permit to implement fully that idea. Nevertheless and despite many difficulties, thanks to those Polish orphanages and homes for invalids, thousands of Polish invalids and children, who otherwise would have perished, survived the hardships of life in the Soviet Union. And when in 1946 thousands of Polish orphans from orphanages in *Samarkand*, *Stavropol*, etc. returned to Poland to form the nucleus of the future citizenry, it was thanks to the herculean efforts of the Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev representing Gen. Sikorski's Government-in-Exile, and to the unselfish work of hundreds of nameless people in various regions of the Soviet Union who made this idea come true and, who frequently sacrificed their lives and their freedom by being again incarcerated in Soviet prison camps and finally dying there.

Accompanied by Counselor M. my uncle paid a visit on the Chairman of the Kuibyshev Provincial *Ispolkom* (a position corresponding to that of a state governor in the U.S.), *Shagimardanov*. The appointment had to be made three days in advance. At the appointed hour the two of them were ushered into a large office furnished with heavy furniture made of dark oak, with heavy draperies on the windows and doors, a large Persian rug on the floor and two large portraits of Lenin and Stalin on the wall behind the desk. The Chairman, a six-foot tall heavy-set man, got up from behind his desk and greeted the visitors without a handshake. Counselor M. and my uncle sat on the chairs indicated by their host and Mr. M., addressing the Chairman as "*CitizenChairman*" introduced my uncle as the Director of the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans. Then my uncle presented the needs of the Home such as fuel, food supplies and dishes. During the 15 minutes when the three of them discussed the organizational plans for the institution, the Chairman addressed them as *Gospodin* (Mister), a title form in Soviet diplomacy reserved exclusively for addressing foreigners.

As they were talking, the Chairman pressed one of the many buttons on his desk. Almost instantly the door opened noiselessly and a valet wheeled in a cart on which there was a tray with a breakfast which consisted of ham sandwiches, an orange and some grapes covered with a white napkin. Next to the tray stood a beautiful tea set with tea. The visit was over. My uncle was to report the next day to the *Ispolkom's* Secretary to pick up letters addressed to the respective administrative bureaus. The two Poles got up, bowed and left, again without shaking hands with their host. My uncle was left speechless: so much luxury, opulence and etiquette, while in the streets there was filth, squalor, poverty and empty stores. On the street Counselor M. explained to my uncle that as an official person he should address Soviet officials as "*Citizen*" and not as "*Comrade*."

The next day the letters were ready. Each had a similar text: "*The Chairman of the Kuibyshev Ispolkom, in accordance with decisions of the Council of People's Commissars*" dated ..., asks ... (organization, office, etc.) to render assistance to Citizen..., Director of the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans. Any individual ignoring this letter will be legally responsible. Ignored by the Chairman of the Kuibyshev *Ispolkom* and by the First Secretary of the Provincial Party Organization." The letters made a tremendous impression, and my uncle had no difficulty getting *naryady*, purchase orders at government prices. The most important *naryady* were for 380 cubic meters (cubic yards) of firewood, food supplies for 200 people for three months and dishes. My uncle left this last purchase order in the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy, because the Department had the use of a truck and a warehouse, so the plates, cups, spoons, knives, forks, buckets, pots, pans, etc. could be stored there until there could be some arrangements made of transporting them to *Sergeyevka*. Part of the food provisions my uncle obtained in the provincial warehouse and brought with him. The rest was to be picked up in *Koshki*. The daily rations for a person were as follows: groats, peas, or white flour for noodles - 70 gm, meat - 50 gm, sugar, candy or cookies - 20 gm, fat (animal or vegetable) - 30 gm (30 gm = 1 ounce). The bread ration was 500 gm which was equivalent to 300 gm of bread flour. Bread was strictly rationed; therefore, each invalid was to be registered with the *Sel'po* upon his/her arrival at the home and, when this was confirmed

by the village council, the *Sel'po* gave the Home 9 kg (20 pounds) of bread flour per month.

The rations were very small considering that 20 gm of sugar is about one heaping teaspoon. However, when the daily rations were calculated for 200 people for three months, the amounts of food stuffs were staggering: 1260 kg of groats, peas and white flour, 900 kg of meat, 360 kg of sugar, candies or cookies and 540 kg of fats. Partial filling out of the *naryady* in Kuibyshev was achieved by providing "gifts" in the form of several kilograms of sugar and fat for various managers of regional food supply organizations. Additional supplies such as several hundred 50-gram packages of tea, several kilograms of soap, needles, thread, several 20-kilogram cans of lard, a sack of rice, a sack of sugar and several cases of "*Bovril*," (something similar to beef bouillon powder) were also provided by the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy from its warehouse. Of course, there was also a shipment of clothing for the district. The Home was supposed to receive a separate allotment when several carloads of clothing would arrive from Iran.

During his stay in Kuibyshev my uncle roomed in the Embassy and ate in its dining room. There the conditions were luxurious compared to those on the outside. This was true of all embassies as well as important Soviet offices. Superb meals were served in the Embassy's dining room, and one could purchase wines and vodka there. However, the portions were small and bread was rationed (white for the diplomatic corps!) because of war shortages. Several of the waitresses and the kitchen manager were Russian. The Embassy had to hire them knowing full well that they were NKVD agents. Their function was to report on the Embassy staff and any arriving visitors. One or two chauffeurs were also NKVD agents.

Counsellor M. showed my uncle the dormitory which was housed in an old school building. Several of its inhabitants were to become boarders and employees of the Home. My uncle also met Anna and Mary, the future cook and housekeeper respectively. They cleaned the rooms occupied by the Embassy staff, but the provincial NKVD authorities and specifically the *OVIR* (Department of Visas and Registration of Foreigners) refused them permission to remain in the city. The "unofficial" job of those two women was to frequent the "*Gypsy Bazaar*" and sell various items which the staff members received from the Embassy warehouse. The acquired cash permitted the staff members to spend their evenings in the restaurant of the "*grand Hotel*." It was an *Intourist* hotel for foreigners and Soviet dignitaries. Passes to it were issued by the *Narkomindel*, the Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. The entire staff consisted of NKVD agents, and the waiters addressed the guests as *Gospodin* (Mister). On the advice of Counselor S., who was the son of a representative to the last Polish parliament, and Judge K., whom my uncle met at the Embassy, he did not visit the Grand Hotel in order to avoid being watched by NKVD agents.

For the convenience of the diplomatic corps there was also a "*Diplomatic Store*" in the city which carried all kinds of wares including silks, fresh fruit, Crimean and Caucasian wines as well as Astrakhan caviar. The store only catered to diplomats and payment was in foreign currency with \$1.00 = 5.30 *rubles*.

Judge K. had heard a lot about my uncle and was happy to meet him. The judge lived in a camp where the dispensary was located, 6 km (approximately 4 miles) distant from our camp. A few weeks prior to the amnesty he was arrested for "agitation and anti-state activity." Following the amnesty of Polish exiles in August 1941, he was appointed to be the trustee for several of the neighboring settlements. When the Representative of the Polish Embassy in Kirov and his staff were arrested, the judge, anticipating a similar fate, escaped to Kuibyshev and joined the Embassy staff. Judge K. related interesting information to my uncle about our acquaintances who had remained in the settlement. Joe, the dentist, and the whole Mayer family moved to the city where Joe practiced dentistry. Only Sam was not with them. Some time before he had received a summons to report for duty to the Red Army. That night Sam went to see Judge K. and ask his advice, because he did not want to serve in the Red Army. Judge K. said to Sam: "*My Dear Sir! You once took a chance by escaping from the camp in 1940 and returning to Lvov. Take a chance a second time. A Polish Army is being formed in the south of the Soviet Union.*" That same night Sam took a chance for the second time and escaped from the settlement in order to avoid serving in the Red Army. Several weeks later the Mayer family received a letter from Sam saying that he would be evacuated with his army unit to Iran. Judge K. was also familiar with Mrs. Koch's denunciation of my uncle to the NKVD. Neither she nor any member of her family received any assistance from the Embassy.

When the goods for the Home and the district were loaded on the truck, my uncle returned home after an overnight stopover in *Yelkhovka*, 45 km (28 miles) from Koshki. Mr. Dunin arrived on Sunday to distribute the goods brought from the Embassy. The two Sznycer brothers picked him up at "The Home of the Collective Farmer" in Koshki and brought him to Sergeyevka. The two Sznycers, the oldest and the youngest of the brothers, were totally dissimilar. The former was blond with blue eyes and of medium height, the latter a tall dark and strong man. When they talked the difference between the high school educated Isaac and the business smart Saul was even more apparent. The two brothers entertained us with their stories about the good life they had had in the camp, then in Melekess and have now in Petrovka. To us their stories seemed like fairy tales and no wonder; we always had to work hard and could barely make the ends meet. They, on the other hand, never worked physically but occupied themselves with trading and speculation which was very profitable in the Soviet Union as long as an individual was not caught, tried and imprisoned.

In the meantime I was busy preparing rosters for the distribution of clothing and foodstuffs. The rosters had columns for the first and last name of the family head, the number of children in the family under 16 years, a list of items given and a place for the signature. Around 10 a.m. people from Petrovka and a few other villages began to arrive. The inhabitants of Sergeyevka were horrified by the influx of people thinking that they were all coming to live in the Home. Among the arrivals was also a contingent of Gypsies, who behaved quite properly and were pleased with what they received. Since they did not have any rosters of children because they all were illiterate, they were to return for foodstuffs the following week. The Social Welfare Department of the Embassy decided to distribute the food for the children and invalids through the villages, because the Home was not ready as yet to accept anyone even though the products had been received for each person.

The distribution of goods lasted until 5 p.m. to the accompaniment of threats like *"we will report you to NKVD."* Particularly boisterous and threatening was an old woman, who was the mother of two grown up children. Unfortunately, they could not be given any assistance because in 1939 they had voluntarily accepted Soviet citizenship. Although the Embassy continued to consider those people to be Polish citizens and when any of them came to the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy they were given large financial assistance and clothing, the Embassy trustees were forbidden to render them any help because in the official language it meant *"helping and bribing Soviet citizens, and agitating against the Soviet State."*

A heated argument developed between two men from Petrovka and Mr. Dunin, who almost got beaten up by them. One of the men was a truck driver from Warsaw and a deserter from the Red Army, the other one was some shady character from *Czestochowa*. Both of them claimed that Mr. Dunin had not given them enough money and clothes. The whole argument might have turned pretty nasty if my uncle had not intervened. He was from Warsaw and had worked as the chief engineer in a textile mill in *Czestochowa* and, consequently, was able to appease both men. They confessed to my uncle that they wanted to leave the district and needed money. My uncle, in turn, convinced Mr. Dunin to give them 250 rubles. It was a small price to pay for getting rid of the two of them. The inhabitants of Petrovka were particularly pleased with that turn of events, because the two fellows were stealing potatoes and vegetables from all of the gardens as well as chickens from the chicken coops. After the distribution of goods was finished the Sznycers took part of the food for Petrovka and left with Mr. Dunin whom they were to drop off in Koshki. Several items of every type of clothing remained as a reserve in case some needy Pole unexpectedly showed up. We were only too happy to go to sleep after such a busy and stormy day.

The next morning my uncle took a pair of ladies shoes to the village mayor, Anna Pavlovna, and a sweater to the school principal, Maria Alexandrovna. Both coyly refused the gifts but it did not take much to change their minds. My uncle arranged with the two women to take him the next day to the *Leskhoz* (the Forestry Administration) in *Salavan* where they were to order firewood for the mayor's office and the school, and he would do the same for the Home. My uncle returned home and after an hour or two the school principal's mother came running: *Could I, please, buy a pair of stockings for Maria for milk or potatoes because hers completely fell apart?* We gave her a pair without taking anything in exchange. I just entered the transaction into my ledger under the *"Special Expenses"* column (meaning "Bribes") *"One pair of stockings."*

At dinner time Mr. Surgiel showed up with a request for my uncle: *"Sir, could you give me a pair of panties?"* My uncle looked at him very seriously and asked: *"For what do you need panties?"* At which point Mr. Surgiel replied: *"I am planning to get married and I want you to be the matchmaker."* My uncle did not bat an eye and, in a serious manner, continued his dialog with Mr. Surgiel, while my aunt and I were just about ready to burst laughing. *"If I am to be the matchmaker, I have to know whom you wish to marry."* my uncle said. My aunt and I exchanged glances while my uncle continued: *"Is that the one with the goatee, Stepan Sergeyevich?"* I could barely hold back laughter and ran for the door. Before reaching it I heard Mr. Surgiel's answer: *"No, Sir, with Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, because she rides horses so nicely."* After that my aunt flew out of the room and burst out laughing.

My uncle tried to convince Mr. Surgiel of the futility of his matrimonial plans but was totally unsuccessful. Because there was no way of getting rid of "love struck" Surgiel, my uncle gave him a pair of violet *"dessoux"* with the condition that he would not present them to the object of his amorous interests but use them himself as swimming trunks. That evening Anna Pavlovna arrived at our adobe fit to be tied: *"If you don't do something about that Surgiel of yours, I will notify the militia and they will move him to another district. He does not leave me alone and constantly follows me like a shadow. Yesterday I was at the school principal's, he came in, sat down in the corner, did not utter a word and just looked at me bug-eyed. This morning I was riding in my tarantas he jumped in and just looked at me without saying a single word. What the hell is wrong with that guy?"* My uncle said with a perfectly straight face: *"Love, my dear Anna Pavlovna. Love is not a potato; one does not throw it out the window. (Lyubov ne kartoshka, ne vybrosish za okoshka! - a Russian saying). He wants to marry you."* and we all started to laugh. *"I will teach him a lesson. That dim wit!"* (A very loose translation of *Ya yemu khvost nakruchu, duraku-to!*).

Two days later the three of them, Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, Maria Alexandrovna, the school principal and my uncle, drove to the *Leskhoz* in Salavan located about 15 km (10 miles) from Sergeyevka. I knew where the place was because twice before I had gone with Steve on foot to the Sunday fair in order to barter some things for butter and meat. The fair was attended by Tartars, Chuvashs and Mordvins from neighboring villages, and the prices of food stuffs were significantly lower than those in Koshki. Salavan was an industrial settlement because of the nearby forest, a sawmill and a chemical plant which produced tannin and other chemicals from oak trees. In the evening my uncle returned from Salavan. He had purchased a parcel in the forest and was supposed to send workers there who would prepare firewood. Because of the wartime and the shortage of labor, the *Leskhoz* did not have a prepared supply of firewood. The *Leskhoz* director had invited my uncle to the mess hall for dinner. Of course, both Anna Pavlovna and Maria Alexandrovna were also invited.

The three of us; i.e. my uncle, my aunt and I passed the time just talking until Kathy fell asleep, and then my uncle laughingly told us the details of his trip to Salavan. As the only man, he was the driver and sat in front, while the two women in the back behaved in such an unorthodox way that even my uncle was embarrassed to turn around. From that time on we started observing the two of them. Anna Pavlovna frequently dressed in pants and high boots, smoked cigarettes, spit out sunflower seed shells, rode on horseback and generally her mannerisms were like those of a man. Maria Alexandrovna, on the other hand, dressed in breezy dresses (she owned just two of them!) and braided her hair. The two women walked through the village hugging each other and kissing openly. The school principal was unmarried but Anna Pavlovna had her two children with her and a husband at the front. Lesbianism was the last thing we expected to encounter in the Soviet Union, in a communist society. In all probability, the shortage of men caused by the war contributed to its appearance.

The subsequent days were full of news and new impressions. Toward the end of the week on a chilly day, a shabbily dressed man in bast shoes and without an overcoat showed up at the Home. He was about 40 years old, a Pole who hailed from *Lublin* where he had graduated from high school, worked as an accountant and left behind his wife and two small children. Now he worked as a blacksmith in the *"Karl Marks Collective Farm"* about 35 km (20 miles) from Sergeyevka. Somehow he had heard about a "Polish Embassy Representative" in Koshki, so he inquired at the *Raispolkom* and was directed to Sergeyevka. Mr. Lubliner was given one piece of every clothing item that had been brought in the transport from Kuibyshev, as well as a blanket. He also asked for a few copies of the Polish newspaper published by the Embassy and initially edited by *Ksawery Pruszyński*, a well-known Polish journalist, and

after the latter's departure for London by *Jan Erdman*. I took Mr. Lubliner for the night to Roza, Samuel and David's cabin which was the most peaceful (when they were not fighting!). The next day at noon Roza came running to tell us that Mr. Lubliner was so overwhelmed by the treasures he had received that he put all of them on, jumped around the room and cried like a small child blessing us as if we had taken the clothing given to him off of our own backs. He sent thank you letters for a long time and only continued to ask us to mail him the Polish newspaper. We mailed him every issue we received and notified him of the arrival of any goods from the Embassy.

During my three-quarter year stint working for the local Social Welfare Committee and later as a member of it, I encountered only two cases where people were truly grateful for the assistance they had received. One was Mr. Lubliner and the other case happened several weeks later, but I mention it at this point because of the similarity between the two cases. It was the middle of October 1942, when an older man who looked like the twin brother of Oliver Hardy showed up at our door. He was a gardener from the environs of *Bialystok* and currently was working on a Tartar collective farm; not only as the sole Pole among the Tartars but also as the only Caucasian. "*Gentlemen,*" he said solemnly to my uncle and me, "*I have enough to eat and I am dressed (his pants and jacket were full of patches) but I would be extremely grateful for a pair of shoes because I just have these bast shoes.*" Of course, he received an overcoat, a pair of pants and underwear but all of the shoes were too small. Actually in the whole transport there were no shoes big enough for him. The gardener was so nice and polite, and made such a pleasant impression on all of us that we felt sorry for this poor man who could not fit into any shoes. Finally my uncle picked out a pair of excellent English army boots with leather soles, gave them to the gardener and suggested that he sell them on the black market and buy shoes which would fit. The gardener absolutely refused to take the boots and we literally had to force him to accept them. Several months later a shoe transport arrived for the district. I immediately put away the largest pair for the gardener and wrote to him to come because the district had received a new transport. A week later he showed up and, taking the previously received but not worn pair of boots from his back pack, said to my uncle: "*Sir, I would appreciate it immensely and only if it isn't too much trouble to exchange these for a larger size.*" We were actually shocked by the simplicity and decency of this man. Of course, we exchanged his boots for the pair I had saved for him and, although they were of a poorer quality and had a rubber sole, they did fit.

Now it is time to get back to the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans which was in the process of being organized. At the end of several weeks my uncle went to Koshki to the various district organizations to get the goods assigned to the Home by the regional authorities in Kuibyshev. In *Raipotrebsoyuz* he became friendly with its chairman, *Ivan Pavlovich*, who had asthma. My uncle promised to bring him some medicine from the Embassy. *Raipotrebsoyuz* was to supply the meat and the remaining food supplies. Several days later Ivan Pavlovich phoned my uncle to come to the warehouse and pick up sugar, peas and flour and also a live steer, several halves of pigs, and some pig heads and pigs feet from the Koshki slaughterhouse. Stepan Sergeyevich, the collective farm chairman, agreed to provide a horse and a wagon, and my uncle went to the district town, accompanied by Mr. Surgiel. That evening they returned dead tired with the wagon full of goods and with a steer walking behind the wagon. The steer, as well as all of the other goods, had to be forwarded to the local *Selpo*. The Home was to be supplied by the Sergeyevka *Selpo* and all of the transactions were at that level.

The manager of our local *Selpo* was *Sashka*, a 22-year old Tartar injured in the arm at the front. In 1941 he was stationed near *Lvov* and served in antitank artillery. During a battle *Sashka's* elbow had stuck out from behind the gun's protecting shield just for a moment and was hit. Consequently, after a stint in military hospitals he was discharged from the army. He returned to his district with a useless arm and was appointed chairman of the *Selpo*. Its staff consisted of *Lisa*, the bookkeeper, and *Boris Kalman*, the store manager and salesman. *Kalman* was from Leningrad, and as a Party member, had also served as a *politruk* (political officer) in the Red Army. During the defense of the city he was injured in the thigh and after being patched up in a military hospital, he was evacuated with his large family to Sergeyevka. In the summer he served as a Party representative to the collective farm but later was appointed to the very lucrative position of the manager and salesman of the *Selpo* store. *Boris* immediately busied himself with the goods. *Tomorrow I will deliver everything but I would like to keep the steer's tongue. Do something about it!*" He said. The next day at noon *Boris* brought a wagon with the cut up carcass of the steer, the pig halves and heads, etc. We found a butcher's block somewhere, located a sharp ax and a knife, and

Boris went after the carcasses with an air of familiarity. After first being divided in two, the steer carcass was divided into smaller parts. *I have always been employed in 'Pishcheprom' (the food industry) and in Leningrad I was a warehouse manager,*" he proudly announced. Of course, my uncle gave him the tongue for a "job well done." That was not all, however, because Boris also received a kilogram (2 pounds) of sugar, a kilogram of hard candy and several outfits for his children. We were forced to cooperate because in the area of the food supply the Home was totally dependent on the *Sel'po*. The next day Lisa showed up for her portion: 2 kg of pork, a kilogram of sugar and a kilogram of hard candy. Sashka took only a kilogram of sugar. In this manner all of the "dignitaries" were taken care of.

Several days later the Poles' representatives from the other districts and villages began to arrive in order to pick up food for their children and invalids. The Gypsies also showed up and were very grateful for all of the help. Each family had several children and there was nothing to steal in the Russian villages so the Gypsies had a hard time supporting themselves. Fortune telling seemed to be their sole source of support. The representative from the *Shentala* District, a funny sort of a guy, arrived one day and introduced himself as "Mr. X, son-in-law of Mrs. Glass." I must explain at this point that the name Glass was well-known and respected throughout prewar Poland. The late Julian Glass was a leading steel industrialist and frequently contributed large sums of money for equipping the Polish Army. Several months before the outbreak of the war in September 1939, he donated 1,000,000 *zlotys* (close to \$200,000 at the prewar exchange rate) to the Air Defense Fund. Although the mother-in-law of Mr. X was only a distant relative of "THE Julian Glass," the name Glass alone made such an impression that Mr. X's persistent letters to the Polish Embassy on behalf of his mother-in-law resulted in her being provided with a monthly stipend of 300 *rubles* by the Embassy. An order was also given to Mr. Dunin to give her special consideration during food distributions. However, the most amusing thing in this whole situation was Mr. X's behavior. He always referred to her as "Mrs. Glass" and never as "my mother-in-law." In the rosters for clothing she was listed as a single person, yet his listing included himself, his wife and his mother-in-law because "*he was supporting her.*" It was truly a riot! I got the biggest kick out of the fact that when food was being distributed, Mr. X asked for a double amount of "Bovril." Since irrespective of the frequency of his visits, Mr. X immediately used to remind us that he "just loves 'Bovril'," I could not figure out for the love of me what he was doing with such large amounts of this salty but otherwise healthy and useful seasoning for soups and sauces. I suspect that in addition to seasoning various dishes and spreading "Bovril" on bread, he must have also used it as ... a shoe polish.

In the meantime the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans rose from nothing or, as the Polish saying goes, from "*four naked walls.*" The Embassy sent the first employees: the cook and the assistant housekeeper. The future cook, *Hanka*, was working as a chambermaid at the Embassy. She and her husband had lived in the environs of *Lodz* but moved to the eastern part of Poland. Both were arrested by the Soviet authorities but the husband, a German by nationality living in Poland, was sent to a camp for Germans and disappeared without a trace. In prison *Hanka* gave birth to a baby boy with whom, after the amnesty, she arrived in *Kuibyshev* where the boy died of measles. Maria, the assistant housekeeper, hailed from *Warsaw*, happened to be in the part of Poland occupied by the Red Army in 1939, was arrested and sentenced to 8 years in prison camps for illegally crossing the border. After the amnesty she showed up at the Polish Embassy which at that time was in the process of being evacuated from *Moscow* to *Kuibyshev* and was hired as a chambermaid. In *Kuibyshev* she was hired by the British Embassy where she worked as a chambermaid for Consul *Bostock*.

Shortly after the arrival of *Hanka* and *Maria*, the first invalids sent by *Isaac Sznycer* from *Petrovka* and a boy from *Melekes* sent by Mr. Dunin, arrived at the Home. It was decided that the staff would consist of my uncle as the director, my aunt as the housekeeper, myself as the bookkeeper and warehouse manager, *Steve* as the household manager, *Hanka* as the cook and *Maria* as the assistant housekeeper. The end of September was rapidly approaching and two problems required immediate attention, namely: the preparation of firewood for the winter and finding a medical professional to serve the needs of Home's residents. Both problems were solved with no major difficulty. To secure firewood for the winter my uncle received permission from *Stepan Sergeyevich*, the collective farm chairman, to use the Poles employed by the farm. He appealed to their patriotic conscience and sense of moral duty, and asked the men to prepare firewood from the trees on the parcel purchased from *Leskhoz*. For their labors they were to be rewarded in cash and in food, and given special consideration at the next distribution of clothing. The three latter enticements were more conducive than those of patriotic conscience and moral

duty, and in a few days a brigade under the command of Steve left for Salavan. They lived at the home of a woman whom they had known from previous trips to the forest and in 15 days the supply of firewood was ready.

The problem of medical help was solved thanks to my cousin Kathy. She became sick, and we were very concerned that Kathy might have come down with the measles. Lisa suggested calling in the medical assistant, who was the manager of a dispensary in the Chuvash village across the bridge and only about kilometer (a little over ½ mile) from Sergeevka. She came the next day and visited Kathy every day until Kathy got well.

The medical assistant's name was *Shura* and she moved to the village from *Kharkov* where she had lost both her husband and her child. In the Chuvash village she promptly consoled herself after her loss first with the chairman of the collective farm, and then with the village mayor and most recently with *Sashka*, the chairman of the *Sel'po*. Professionally *Shura* was a very capable medical assistant, so my uncle contacted the Embassy as well as the district health authorities regarding hiring her. The Embassy agreed but indicated that monetary compensation for *Shura*'s services was out of the question because of the limited budget for the Home. It was decided that for 1-2 hour visits three times a week *Shura* would receive one "dry ration," the monthly take home ration of an invalid. It amounted to 1.5 kg (3.3 pounds) of meat, 900 grams (2 pounds) of fat, 600 grams (1.5 pounds) of sugar and 2.1 (4.5 pounds) kg of groats. Also she would receive additional products sent by the Embassy as well as soap and clothes. The health authorities of the district did not object to our employing *Shura* as long as it did not interfere with her official responsibilities. So we added a medical professional to our staff.

With the arrival of the first invalids, beds became the most urgent problem. The Embassy had no way of providing them either directly or through the Soviet authorities. Any available beds were requisitioned for military hospitals. *"See what you can do yourselves."* Counselor M. once said over the phone. My uncle's attempts to intervene with the Soviet authorities in Koshki about getting beds from the furniture taken away from the exiled Germans proved fruitless. When more invalids showed up they started to steal boards and doors from stables and sheds in order to fashion plank beds out of them. This, in turn, caused an unpleasant situation. The chairman of the collective farm and the foreman used to come to the Home and take back the boards. Consequently, people had to sleep on the floor or on straw mattresses and cover themselves with blankets or overcoats. A small suitcase (if available), their pants and shirts served as the pillow.

People did not have a change of either underwear or clothes. Because there were neither tables nor chairs (although the school lent the Home two school benches), people had to lie or sit on their beds. This situation was the source of constant dirt, dust and lice. A lack of kerosene lamps and the use of kerosene in oil lamps blackened not only the walls and ceilings with soot but also people's nostrils. Sanitary conditions were abominable. It was truly a miracle that a typhus epidemic did not break out, because the invalids were full of lice until March 20, 1946, when at Pogruznaya train station they boarded a transport taking them back to Poland and ... took the lice with them.

However, not everything was negative. There was also a positive side if one realizes that those people, who were totally unable to do any kind of physical work (and only that kind would have been available to them in the Soviet Union), were able to survive through the severe Russian winters for the entire three and one-half years without having to worry about fuel and food. They were not forgotten, and the food was luxurious in comparison with Soviet food rations which were only 2/3 of ours. Our family ate the same food as the invalids, although we could have had it prepared separately. Counselor M. told my uncle: *"You and your family can take as much as you want. We cannot compensate you for your efforts and labors in money, so we do it in tangible goods."*

The first invalids who arrived in the Home stayed close together because they knew one another from the Embassy's dormitory in Kuibyshev. In the evenings when I used to go to their hall and chat with them, they reminisced about their stay in the dormitory, about the visits by Gen. Sikorski, Chief of Chaplains of the Polish Armed Forces, Bishop W. P. Gawlina and Fr. Kucharski. The living conditions in the dormitory, which was housed in a school building on Galaktionovska Street, were similar to those in our Home for Invalids. The rooms were so overcrowded that people had to step over one another. The

children were getting sick, and every day someone was taken to the hospital. The Social Welfare Department of the Embassy was doing its utmost to provide people with basic living conditions. All of the meals and the 400 gm (1 pound) daily ration of bread were supplied by the restaurant in the Kuibyshev railroad station, so that the fare was not too bad. Because of the severely cold weather and the generally weak physical condition of the people, they did not go to the restaurant. Specially assigned individuals used to go every mealtime to the restaurant by Embassy car with kettles and sacks to bring the food back to the dormitory. The diet of both children and adults was also supplemented with food products shipped from abroad such as sugar, condensed milk and animal fats.

When Gen. Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, arrived in the Soviet Union in the beginning of December 1941 and came to Kuibyshev, the dormitory was on his itinerary. The people who lived there gathered in one big hall with the children in their arms. The General entered the hall accompanied by several Polish officers, a high-ranking British officer and two NKVD officers. He was obviously moved and had tears in his eyes. People cried and pushed their children toward him. The Prime Minister took some to hold, kissed them, stroked their heads and repeated over and over again: *"My dear people! Everything will be all right. We will help you with all of our means and you will be the first ones to return to Poland. We have not forgotten you. You must hold out and survive."* Those and similar stories helped people pass evenings in the Home. The other type of evening chats were personal reminiscences of life in prewar Poland. Those were just as varied, interesting and colorful as the people who spun them.

In October 1942 there were already several invalids in the Home, both men and women as well as two orphans: a boy and a girl. The boy, Stasio, was 14 years old. His parents had died in a settlement. He had finished primary school in Poland and was sent to Petrovka where he worked as a shepherd. The girl, *Stefa*, was 8 years old. She had arrived in Sergeyevka with her parents but all three of them came down with typhus and were sent to the hospital. The parents died but Stefa survived and was shipped to a Soviet orphanage near Petrovka. Thanks to Roza, who told us the story and who had kept Stefa's parents passports, Isaac Sznycer took the girl from the orphanage and brought her together with the boy, Stasio to the Home. Stefa was a quiet, frightened girl and in time became my cousin Kathy's friend. Kathy was only too happy to have a friend her own age. Stasio liked to fish in the lake and called condensed milk *"mliik."* He used to say that *"their"* language (meaning probably English!) is similar to Polish because *"they say 'mlik' and we say 'mliko'."* Actually the word for milk in Polish is *"mleko"* but many peasants especially in the eastern part of the country used to say *"mliko."*

In the first group of women two invalids stuck in my memory. One, a young woman, walked on crutches because she had only one leg. After the amnesty she, her husband and two children had traveled south by train. At some stop she went under the car to relieve herself. The train started moving, she failed to jump out in time and fell under a wheel which cut off her leg. She was immediately taken to a hospital but her husband and the children left on that train, and she lost track of them. Eventually the hospital sent her to the Embassy but all of the efforts by the Embassy to find her family failed. The second woman was an older emaciated invalid, who huffed and puffed like a locomotive, chain-smoked cigarettes, was always cross and nervous, and suffered from chronic asthma. At night her loud moaning, coughing and gasping for breath used to wake the men sleeping in the next room.

The "male group" of invalids was both larger and more colorful. The most interesting person was *Waclaw*. I became very friendly with him later on when both of us worked as partners in the *"Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm."* *Waclaw* hailed from Warsaw where first he drove a taxi and later worked as a driver and an extra in a film producing company. He had a seemingly inexhaustible supply of stories, anecdotes and sayings typical of *Powisle*, one of the rough districts in Warsaw, located on the left bank of the Vistula River. *Waclaw* spun his stories offhandedly in a dry emotionless voice and with half closed eyelids, using the characteristic Warsaw dialect. He was a well-read and intelligent individual who, like many members of the prewar liberal Polish intelligentsia, belonged to PPS (*Polish Socialist Party*). He served as an NCO in the Polish Army in the September 1939 campaign and was incarcerated in one of the prison camps in the Russian Far North. While there he lost all of the toes on his right foot to frostbite in January 1941. Following the amnesty in the summer of 1941 *Waclaw* reported for service to the Polish Army being formed in USSR but was rejected because of his disability. He found himself in the Embassy's dormitory and then was sent to Petrovka where he used to steal potatoes and tomatoes in

order to survive. Finally Wacław landed in the Home for Polish Invalids. His wound, which had not healed because of vitamin deficiencies, was quite painful and walking for Wacław was akin to torture.

His "roommate," *Mr. Borowicz*, also had arrived from Petrovka with Wacław. He had become an invalid in the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-1920) when, while serving in the cavalry, he became shell shocked. His left hand shook constantly and he had difficulty walking because his left leg was paralyzed. In addition, *Mr. Borowicz* had mental impairments. When he held a metal canteen in his left, shaking hand it made enough racket to wake the dead in a grave. However, when one asked him: "Mr. Borowicz! How would you hold a rifle to shoot the Bolsheviks?" "This way!" *Mr. Borowicz* would answer and extend his left hand with the canteen in it as if he were holding and aiming an imaginary rifle, and ... *Mr. Borowicz's* hand did not shake and his canteen did not rattle.

Among the others the Embassy sent to the Home from Kuibyshev was *Mr. Adler*. He worked in a collective farm as a night watchman, became sick and was sent to a hospital. When he got well, the hospital sent him to the Embassy. *Mr. Adler* hailed from *Krakow* where he had worked as a waiter in the famous cafe and night club "*Cyganeria*." He was a short man, 55-years old with a completely bald head, large stomach and generally rather funny posture. With true relish *Mr. Adler* reminisced about his work as a waiter, about the various dishes he had served his customers and about the tips left by such famous personages in prewar *Krakow* as *Wincenty Witos*, one of the leaders of the peasant movement in Poland, *Gen. Bernard Mond*, head of the military district and many others whose names I do not recall. *Mr. Adler's* most faithful listener was Wacław who, because of his knowledge of all of the B-rated joints in Warsaw, could discuss food with the ex-waiter for hours.

One day a tall 70-year old man came on foot from a distant collective farm and was at once accepted into the Home. A tinsmith by profession, he hailed from the Lublin area and immediately started helping around the Home by repairing buckets, bowls, etc. so as "not to be a burden." Soon the word about him got around and the peasants started bringing various items to him for repair. This way the old man was able to have a small income which he could keep. He established his shop in the building housing the kitchen and the dining hall, and all day long one could hear the sound of the old tinsmith's hammering. This drove the cook out of her mind. She had no assistant; the men who were capable carried water from the well to the kitchen for her, and peeling potatoes was the women's job.

Winter was approaching rapidly. The days became cold and cloudy, and it rained most of the time. For the winter it was necessary to secure a supply of potatoes and vegetables, as well as several cubic meters (yards) of firewood in the shed in case muddy roads or snow storms made travel impossible. All of our intercessions with the authorities relating to those matters were fruitless. The *Selpo* was supposed to supply the Home with potatoes and vegetables, which were to come from the farmers as their payments of state taxes in products from their individual plots of land. Since the farmers were in no hurry to fulfill their tax obligations, the Home had no reserves of produce and frequently it was even necessary to decrease the amount of potatoes allotted for meals to the state norm level which was 200 grams (a little under 7 ounces) of unpeeled potatoes per day. The problem of fuel was no better than that of food supplies. The *Raispolkom* ordered the collective farms of *Sergeyevka* County to supply the Home with firewood from its parcel in the forest. No matter how hard my uncle pressed the matter with *Anna Pavlovna*, the delivery of fuel was sporadic at best. Phone calls to the Embassy which in turn intervened in *Oblispolkom*; i.e. on the regional level, did not do much good.

In the meantime *Mr. Dunin* was dismissed from his position as the "Embassy's Trustee," and my uncle had to pitch in temporarily. As I have mentioned before, the dismissal of trustees was the aftermath of a memorandum and a roster of names submitted by the *Narkomindel* (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs). The Embassy was hard pressed to find new trustees acceptable to the Soviet authorities. This in turn caused a terrible administrative mess. At the end of October a new trustee arrived in our district. He was a handsome 29-year old man who had worked in the Embassy for a short time. His name was *Michael*, and his home town was *Krzemieniec* in *Galicia* from where he had been taken to a prison camp. After the amnesty *Michael* and a friend found themselves in one of the towns in the *Penza* region. Thanks to an intercession on their behalf by the local trustee, who had been a Girl Scout leader in Poland, the two of them found some work in the Embassy. While his friend remained in the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy, *Michael* was appointed a trustee for our district. He arrived at the Home dressed just in a

shirt, trousers and an overcoat. Fortunately, there were still a few things left from the September transport which fit him. He stayed with us a few days, and we spent the evenings talking about old times, joking about Soviet inefficiency, etc.

One evening Steve and I went to the windmill with Michael. It happened to be a happy occasion because Uncle Peter had returned from *Bezimyanka* after having been dismissed from the "Work Front." Uncle Peter was a tall man who had short clipped hair and yellow teeth from constant smoking. We stayed pretty late at the mill. Michael flirted with Lisa and played the guitar, while Steve and I talked with Nina. The millers were honored that "*the Polish representative*" came to visit. Their feelings were magnified by mine and Steve's attitude toward him. We treated him with respect always remembering that we were only employees of the Home for Polish Invalids, whereas he was a Trustee of the Embassy.

During the few days that Michael stayed with us, he familiarized himself with the day to day operations of the Home and with his future work in the district. Finally my uncle went with him to Koshki which was to be Michael's base of operations. He found living quarters at Aunt Tosya's. Aunt Tosya was well known in Koshki and very popular with all of the Poles in the district. She was Polish and had lived near *Radom* until 1915 when she escaped to Russia before the German advance. She married a Russian and they worked together on the Volga River. Finally they settled in Koshki, bought a small house, a goat and a few chickens, and her husband worked somewhere. They had no children, so when her husband died Aunt Tosya remained alone. She tried to return to Poland where she still had some family but was unable to get permission from the authorities. It was just impossible to leave the Soviet Union. For some time Aunt Tosya corresponded with her family in Poland and even received a photograph of her two nephews in Polish cavalry uniforms with curved sabers and Polish eagles on their caps. She proudly displayed that photograph on a small table facing the door, so that anyone entering the room could not help noticing it.

In the fall of 1939 Aunt Tosya wrote to the Polish Embassy in Moscow asking for assistance with finding her family with whom she had lost contact. The answer, written in German and on stationary with a German eagle holding in his claws a wreath with a swastika, stated that the property of the former Polish Embassy had become the property of the Third Reich and that "the Polish State had ceased to exist." Left totally alone and with no hope of making contact even with her distant family in Poland, Aunt Tosya started *getting ready for the casket*" (as she herself so eloquently stated). She laid out her best dress, a pair of shoes, her prettiest kerchief and a small icon of the Virgin Mary of Czestochowa. However, Aunt Tosya did not die, and real Poles speaking Polish showed up in the district. When Mr. Dunin arrived in Koshki for the first time, she found him in the inn, the "Home of the Collective Farmer," invited him to her home for milk and told him proudly: *My goat gives the best milk in Koshki, not like that of those Russian goats!* Whenever a transport from the Embassy arrived for the district, both Mr. Dunin and my uncle used to give Aunt Tosya gifts. When Kathy came down with the measles, the old woman sent a quarter of a kid because "*it is good for the disease.*" She spoke a funny mixture of Polish and Russian. Since for quite a while Aunt Tosya had had no *kvaritant* (Russian for lodger), Michael decided to stay with her in exchange for clothing, food, and soap. Consequently, he remained in Koshki and was helpful to my uncle by intervening with the district authorities in matters pertaining to the Home. From time to time he traveled to the various villages in order to acquaint himself with the living conditions of the Polish population.

At that time a new group of Poles was sent to the "Engels Collective Farm." Before the local Germans were expelled, "Engels" was the largest and richest collective farm in the whole Kuibyshev region. The village extended for 8 km (5 miles), had its own power plant, (every house had electricity!) and the threshing machines, which were located in barns, were run by electric motors. The village had its own grain elevator and two flour mills: one operated by a steam engine and the other one by a diesel. In the middle of the village there was a beautiful park with a church which had been converted into a clubhouse. Every house consisted of 2-3 rooms and had a sheet metal covered porch. A stable and a barn were an integral part of the household complex. In the hallway there was a well. The ceilings as well as the floors in the living quarters were painted with oil paint and not just whitewashed. Of course, after the German farmers were expelled and new ones like the Tatars and the Chuvashs were brought in, the collective farm deteriorated. The authorities in Kuibyshev were unable to settle the whole village in spite of sending the Poles and the Russian evacuees from the war zone there.

The Poles arrived in one group from some northern region where their amnesty was delayed for almost a year, until 1942. They showed up at the Embassy, which in turn, sent them to Koshki. The *Raispolkom* reached an agreement with Mr. Dunin to have this group of Poles settle in the "Engels Collective Farm." Shortly thereafter three men arrived in the village who, in no time at all, became the most popular individuals among the Poles. They came from the environs of *Stalingrad* (presently *Volgograd*) and had escaped the German advance. The oldest, 60-year old *Mr. Sosinski*, was accepted into the Home after a few weeks. The second one was a 30-year old Catholic priest, *Mr. Wladyslaw*, who did not wish to be addressed as "Father" or "Reverend." He had been a pastor somewhere in the eastern part of Poland and when the Bolsheviks occupied that area, he was arrested and shipped off to a prison camp. After the amnesty he did not have sufficient time to reach the Polish Army units in the south, because he was not released until February 1942. Thus, he settled near Stalingrad where he met Mr. Sosinski and the third man, *Yudka*. Yudka was a small freckled, redheaded Jewish "water deliverer" (*balagula* in Yiddish, a man who drives a wagon with a barrel of water and delivers it to households in villages and small towns which have no piped water). All three of them hailed from the environs of *Krzemieniec* which was also the stomping ground of Mr. Dunin and Michael. When Michael visited us following his inspection trip to the "Engels Collective Farm," we again had a topic of conversation for a long evening.

The Poles who settled in the "Engels Collective Farm" had good working conditions. They were assigned to preparing the firewood in the forest for the needs of the collective farm. The foreman of the Polish work brigade was the priest and his right-hand man was Yudka. The two lived together and worked together, and Yudka watched over the priest as if the latter were a small child. When they were working, Yudka interrupted the work from time to time, slipped his hand under the priest's padded jacket in the area of his heart and concluded anxiously: "*Little Father (ksiezulko) you are tiring yourself out. Rest a little.*" And he sat the priest down on the nearest tree stump. After a few minutes rest, Yudka permitted the priest to continue working. Yudka did the cooking and slipped his friend the larger portions. The priest told Michael in no uncertain terms that when next transport of clothing comes, Yudka must be well equipped because he had no change of clothes. When he washed whatever little he owned, Yudka had to sit in the room and wait until the wash dried. The friendship of Yudka and Mr. Wladyslaw, who were two extremes in just about everything, including their outward appearance, their religious faiths, their professions and their education, was simply unbelievable.

One of the last days of October, I met the legendary Yudka when he brought Mr. Sosinski to the Home. Yudka looked like a caricature from the pages of a satirical magazine. He was short, had large Chaplinesque shoes on bowed legs, was toothless, had a freckled face and a big frostbitten nose, with redhaired eyebrows and eyelashes, and thick straight red hair on his head which stuck out in all directions. Yudka wore a *tulup*, a sheepskin coat with a large standing collar, which was too big for him, and dragged on the ground, so that one had the distinct impression that the *tulup* just moved by itself with no person inside it. Everybody was curious to see the priest's pal because their friendship was legendary throughout the district. While Yudka's horse rested, Yudka was treated to an "invalid's dinner." Yudka then cordially said goodbye to Mr. Sosinski, promised to visit him frequently and left.

The new invalid readily became acquainted with the rest of the group. He used to be a manager of an estate in the *Vilno* Province and was shipped into the Soviet Union together with his two sons. Of course, the boys were separated from their father and he lost contact with them. All of the attempts by the Missing Persons' Department of the Polish Embassy to find the boys proved fruitless. Then in 1944, when the Red Army occupied the Vilno Province and postal communications were restored, Mr. Sosinski received a letter from his wife in which she said that both boys were in Turkey and had communicated with her. In all probability they had illegally crossed the Soviet-Turkish border after the 1941 amnesty. This was quite a feat, because crossing the borders of the Soviet Union illegally was extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible. Any individual caught within a 200 km (125 miles) border zone without a proper permit was immediately tried for attempted crossing of the border which carried a 10-year prison term, since the crime fell within Article 58 of the Soviet Union's Legal Code; *i.e.* sedition and counterrevolutionary activity.

At the time of Mr. Sosinski's arrival in the Home there was already a significant number of

residents. The "women's group" had increased by two new invalids. One was an old woman, the mother of two spinster daughters, who prayed all day long, showered blessings on my uncle and on the Embassy for establishing the Home for Polish Invalids and kissed my aunt whenever they had a chance, which drove my aunt out of her mind. The second woman, *Luba*, was 23 years old and mentally ill. She hailed from *Lomza* and in June 1940, when the Soviets were shipping people out of her town, she went to the railroad station to watch "the show." The militiamen arrested her and without asking any questions put her in a car with the others. And so poor *Luba* was accidentally sent into the interior of the Soviet Union even though she was totally innocent. After surviving in a settlement, being amnestied and traveling from the north of the Soviet Union to *Kuibyshev*, *Luba* found herself in the Embassy's dormitory from where she was sent to *Petrovka*. In that village *Luba*, like many other Poles, was placed under the care of the *Szyncers* who eventually brought her to the Home. She was a quiet unassuming girl. When spoken to, *Luba* bashfully lowered her head and nervously pulled on buttons of her blouse. She talked with an air of detachment about her affliction as if she were talking about a film or a theater play: *"My sister was mentally ill, truly crazy and so was my Mommy but I am not. Only once in Poland did I become sick and then they fed me through a tube. Then I got well."* Once *Luba* told us about her love life which probably contributed to her illness. *"I used to go out with a boy but Mommy forbade me to see him because he was a 'shaygets' (a Pole whereas Luba was Jewish). He was so handsome with a head full of black hair and beautiful black eyes. He had a revolver, a real one, and used to say that some day he would shoot me."* *Waclaw*, who was always bored to death, enjoyed talking with *Luba* just to have something to do.

The "men's group" had increased much more than that of the women. Three men arrived from a district 70 km (44 miles) distant from *Sergeyevka*. One was actually as healthy as an ox, but complained of rheumatism. He brought with him food supplies and a lot of clothes. He immediately started making advances toward *Hania*, the cook, who was not indifferent toward him. His greatest asset, however, was being able to play the accordion. The collective farm owned an accordion but the only accordion player in the whole village was Uncle Peter, the miller, who only played when he felt like it or when he had had a few drinks. Consequently, the farm's clubhouse was always closed. Now our invalid played the accordion in the clubhouse every Sunday.

The second of the "three musketeers," *Mr. Kozuch*, was a dull, colorless but shrewd individual. He hailed from *Pomerania* and used to sell fruits and vegetables from a stall in a market place in *Grudziadz*. However, he had a much more interesting past than one could even suspect. *Mr. Kozuch* had been to the U.S.A. twice and, after his second stay, returned to Poland in 1934. While in the U.S. he had worked on a farm and later in a factory. He was a conscientious worker and never took a drink. Once his foreman took him to a bar. *Mr. Kozuch* did not drink much, but he drank enough to lose three fingers of his right hand to a machine. Despite his disability he could handle various tools with his maimed hand and was quite handy, so we nicknamed him *"The Golden Hand."* Unfortunately, *Mr. Kozuch*, like the old tinsmith and all the other invalids believed that they should not work, that everything was due them, and they should get extra rewards for any job even though it was for the common good.

The third invalid was from *Lvov*. Before the war he had worked in a publishing house as a salesman traveling around the countryside. During one of his sales trips traveling between the villages and towns he got frostbitten and lost all the toes on his left foot and half of his right foot. Now the tips of his shoes were curved upwards like Turkish slippers because they were empty, and he walked with little steps supporting himself with a cane. *Mr. Czeslaw* was an old bachelor and his face was as wrinkled like a monkey's behind. Although he seemed perfectly normal mentally, *Mr. Czeslaw* had a passion which in my opinion was plain craziness. In the evening he used to rip old socks by the light of the kerosene lamp and wind the threads on pieces of paper. When his pants wore out in some place, he would sew on a patch and then in true artistic fashion would embroider the edges of the patch with white or colored thread from the socks. Several patches (and there was quite a number of patches on *Mr. Czeslaw's* trousers) even had *Mr. Czeslaw's* initials carefully embroidered on them. Despite his exquisite taste in selecting the colors of the threads and the type of lettering, those initials, which were sometimes located in the most unexpected places on the man's trousers made an uncanny impression.

Another interesting person sent by the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy was *Mr. Kolanko*. He was a tall man with a black mustache who wore a British greatcoat and riding boots. One could tell from his demeanor as well as his overall bearing that at some time he must have been a

professional soldier. It turned out that Mr. Kolanko used to serve as a lieutenant in those units of the Russian army which fought on the Western Front in World War I and at Verdun he had lost his left arm above the elbow. After being discharged from the army he moved to North Africa. Mr. Kolanko spoke fluent French and, since our cook had spent several years in France working as a waitress, the two of them constantly conversed in French. In due course we began to suspect that Mr. Kolanko was an NKVD agent. When the Embassy was certain about it and notified us, it was already too late. The thought had never even crossed our minds that the NKVD would place its agents in the Home.

Shortly after Mr. Kolanko's arrival another NKVD agent showed up at the Home. Again the Embassy warned us too late, namely at the time when the administration of the Home was already being taken over by the Soviet authorities. The new invalid arrived in an unexpected manner and, in a way that was unique. One day my uncle was called to the phone in the collective farm's administration office. At the other end of the line was a *basso profundo* speaking with a mixture of Polish and Russian. *"I am Father Oszmianski, a Russian Orthodox priest. The Polish Embassy sent me to the Home and I am waiting at Pogruznaya railroad station for you to come and fetch me. In Poland, I suffered at the hands of the Poles and here in Russia I have been persecuted and still suffer at the hands of the Bolsheviks!"* This last sentence was rather strange considering that the telephone line was undoubtedly bugged. Since the Home had neither a horse nor a wagon, my uncle suggested that *batiushka* (the usual Russian language form when addressing an Orthodox priest) walk to the grain elevator and find a wagon going in the direction of Sergeyevka. Several hours later *batiushka* showed up with his possessions, which consisted of two large suitcases, a big bundle with bedding and ... a *samovar*.

While my uncle was entering his name into the Home's records, *batiushka* told his life story. He was 63 years old. When the Red Army had occupied the small town in the Vilno Province, where he had lived with his 80-year old mother, his wife and two daughters, he was arrested by the NKVD, shaved, tortured and subjected to various indignities in numerous prisons. Finally during the amnesty of Polish exiles in 1941 *batiushka*, who was a *Belarus*, but a Polish citizen, was freed. He went to *Buzuluk*, to the Headquarters of the Polish Army in the USSR, had several talks with Gen. Anders and was nominated the Russian Orthodox Chaplain because there were Russian Orthodox servicemen in the Polish Army units. Fr. Oszmianski also contacted the Metropolitan in Kuibyshev in order to get clerical vestments and liturgical objects. He visited Kuibyshev several times, celebrated Mass in the only church that was open, baptized children in private homes and presided over religious weddings. One day he was picked up on the street and taken to the provincial NKVD headquarters. After a savage beating, having his hair and beard pulled and his head knocked against a wall, *batiushka* was told he was a Polish spy and would be shot like a dog. The Embassy sent food parcels to him in prison and intervened on his behalf with the authorities. The NKVD told the Embassy representatives that Fr. Oszmianski practiced religion which was considered to be an antistate activity and fell under Article 58, part 10, of USSR's Legal Code; *i.e.* agitation against the Soviet State. Several months passed by with no word about *batiushka*. His vestments and liturgical objects were stored in the Embassy's warehouse but *batiushka* had simply vanished. In the meantime the Polish Army units left for Iran without their Russian Orthodox chaplain.

When one day in September 1942 Fr. Oszmianski showed up at the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy, it seemed like a resurrection. He had lost weight, his complexion was yellowish, and his hair had become gray. He described what he went through in prison, what diabolical tortures his interrogators invented, how many times they put a revolver to his temple and pulled the trigger (he did not know the chamber was empty) to scare the old man. *"I was not going to be coerced into lying and saying that I was a Polish spy. Finally they let me go."* Immediately he was given additional food rations to build him up after his prison sojourn. However, the mere fact that the priest was released from imprisonment by the NKVD despite the serious charge of espionage and that he continued to perform his priestly functions just as he had done prior to his arrest arose the suspicions of the Embassy staff.

Everybody was aware of the NKVD's methods; it could pin any crime on a person and always find supporting evidence. There was a saying about trials in tsarist courts "Prove that you are not a camel." The situation had not changed after the October Revolution. Consequently, the Social Welfare Department, suspecting (and rightly so), that the priest was now in NKVD's service, decided to rid the dormitory of him. Because he was a Polish citizen but had no permit to live in Kuibyshev, the only avenue open to the Department was to send him to the Home for Polish Invalids in Sergeyevka. It was our tough

luck that the Home acquired another NKVD agent.

In the beginning *batiushka* did not cause any suspicions with his behavior but his dirty work became obvious to all in due course. From the very beginning my uncle warned him not to engage in any religious activities, because it could have disastrous consequences for the Home. Fr. Oszmianski promised he would not make himself available as a priest outside of the Home because "he had suffered sufficiently in the Kuibyshev prison." In the meantime he started getting settled in the Home and, since many people knew him from Embassy's dormitory, he was given a better place, under a window. The old man had chronic bronchitis and wheezed and coughed all day and night. The next day the priest hung a big brass crucifix on the wall facing the door. A few days later the district commandant of NKVD came to Sergeyevka and visited the Home, accompanied by Anna Pavlovna. As soon as he entered the men's room, he noticed the crucifix and his face turned bright red. "*What is it? A crucifix?*" The officer growled. He noticed the priest sitting on the bed that Waclaw had made for him from a few old boards. "*You are what?*" He yelled to Oszmianski. "*A priest? Ah?*" The old man said yes. "*You watch your step! Don't rove in the villages and don't ply your profession if you know what is good for you! Otherwise I will put you away so that you will never see the light of the day!*" The commandant had arrived in bad mood to begin with, and his mood even worsened upon seeing the crucifix. He let my uncle have it "from both barrels." "*What is it? Why do people sleep on the floor? Don't you have any beds?*" Unperturbed my uncle tried to explain to him that the Embassy cannot get any beds for the Home. "*You have to get them yourself! The Embassy has more important matters!*" At this point my uncle, irked by the officer's manner of speaking, said: "*I tried to get beds from the furniture left after resettlement of the Germans but the Raispolkom does not want to give them to us. Besides, what is the point of talking about beds when the Raispolkom ordered the collective farm to ferry firewood prepared by us in forest to the Home, so a single load is delivered every few days which is just about enough for preparing meals!*" The commandant's face mirrored his displeasure. "*Bad, Anna Pavlovna, bad!*" He said to the village mayor and left the room obviously in a huff.

The *Raipotrebsoyuz* (the district office responsible for supplying provisions) in Koshki was unable to supply provisions for the rest of the quarter. There were some other pressing matters like purchasing a horse for the Home and making some arrangements regarding the ferrying of the firewood, because the villagers from the collectives located near the forest were stealing it, therefore, my uncle went to Kuibyshev in the final days of October to handle these matters and left Michael in charge.

On All Saints Day, November 1, (1942), the invalids asked the priest to say Mass. Michael okayed their request under one condition; namely, that nobody from the village would attend except Aunt Masha, the miller's wife, whom we invited to the service. She kept the visit secret from the rest of her family, asked the priest to say a special prayer for her missing son, Ivan, gave him a few rubles and was very grateful that we had invited her to the Mass.

As our invalids settled in, they started frequenting the millers' home and bringing them all kinds of goodies such as clothing, sugar and candy rations, etc. in exchange for milk. Nothing could be done to stop this barter, because we could not prohibit the invalids from leaving the premises of the Home; after all, they were not prisoners. Things got completely out of hand, however, when Fr. Oszmianski started "taking walks" not only in our village but also in the neighboring Chuvash and Mordvinian villages. In no time at all word spread out there was a *batiushka* in the "Polish Home" and the peasant women from our village as well as from the neighboring villages started coming to the Home bringing eggs, butter and baked goods for the priest. Some gave him a few rubles, others a hunk of meat and all of them asked him to visit their cabins in order to say prayers and baptize their children. I called this situation to Michael's attention, but he did not do anything about it and did not even call the priest on the carpet. Fr. Oszmianski's "walks" became more frequent.

The local activists, Party members and members of *Komsomol*, the Communist Youth League, began getting ready to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the "*Great October Revolution*" on November 7 and 8 according to the New Style (Gregorian calendar). A meeting was called on the eve of the holiday, November 6, in the collective farm's club. It was a special building with a large hall in which there was a stage and wooden benches. That day the single stove was stoked with straw from early morning on in order to get the hall warm for the evening. It did not do any good. While it was beastly hot near the stove,

the rest of the hall was cold and people did not dare to take off their outer garments. The first snow storm of the year also started that day. The hall was full because people came from neighboring villages. Of course, they were chairmen of the collective farms and upper echelon bureaucrats who did not have to ask anyone for permission to use the horses and *tarantasses*. Above the stage a slogan, the width of the hall, painted in big red letters on newspaper pages glued together, stated *"Long Live the 25th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution!"* Portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung on the stage itself and underneath them was a smaller slogan: *"Long Live the All-Union Bolshevik Communist Party –The Party of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin!"*

When the hall was full, Anna Pavlovna, the mayor of Sergeyevka and the secretary of the local Party cell stepped onto the stage and announced: *"The general meeting of the members of the 'Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm' commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution will now come to order. I propose that we elect a presidium for this meeting. Please submit candidates from the floor."* The public did not respond. Of course, all of this was prearranged, and it would have been a big surprise for Anna Pavlovna and the other "dignitaries" if one of the farmers stood up and actually proposed candidates to the presidium. Since the times of the "Great October Socialist Revolution" these meetings had been carried out in this way and not in any other. Valya, the school principal's sister, stood up and asked to be heard. Anna Pavlovna gave Valya the floor, and the latter read the names of the earlier agreed upon candidates to the presidium; namely, Anna Pavlovna, the mayor of Sergeyevka, the chairman of our collective farm, the school principal, the representative of the local Communist Youth League cell, two old men-farmers and two women-farmers. This way the statement contained in the Soviet Constitution that "in the Soviet Union women have rights equal to those of men" was satisfied.

Looking at the audience Anna Pavlovna asked: *"No more candidates?"* Nobody uttered a sound. Anna Pavlovna continued: *In this case we will vote for the whole presidium rather than for individual candidates. Those in favor of the candidates, raise your hands."* A few hands were timidly raised. *"Anyone against?"* A few feeble voices said "no." *Accepted by a unanimous vote."* Anna Pavlovna announced. *"Please you're your seats in the presidium."* The mayor thus ended the formal part of the meeting. The members of the elected presidium climbed onto the stage shuffling their feet and took their seats behind a table covered with a red cloth, with two kerosene lamps standing on it. Now the secretary of the Communist Youth League cell, who was the niece of Borys Kalman, the *Sel'po* salesman, asked to be recognized and suggested that those present elect an "honorary presidium" consisting of Stalin and all of the Politburo members; i.e. the unofficial but real ruling body of the country.

Then Anna Pavlovna, as the chairperson of the meeting's presidium, gave the floor to Maria Alexandrovna, the school principal, who read a historical paper about the 1917 revolution. Basically the paper was a copy of a suitable chapter from "The History of the All-Union Bolshevik Party," supplemented by articles from "Activist's Companion" and "The Bolshevik," and by an editorial from Pravda. Every time Maria Alexandrovna mentioned the name "Stalin" or "Yosif Vissarionovich," Anna Pavlovna started applauding. That was the signal for the rest of the presidium members and the audience to follow suit. The talk was both long and boring. Although it contained remarks about the "great Allies," the listener easily got the impression that only the Soviet Union was meaningfully contributing to the eventual demise of the enemy. A cursory mention was made about the air raids by the RAF on the German industrial centers. Maria Alexandrovna ended her talk with three slogans: "Long live the 25th anniversary of the Great October (Revolution)!", "Long live our Great Leader and Teacher, the Shining Sun of our Great Country, the most ingenuous Stalin!" and "Long live our great, heroic and invincible Red Army!." The audience responded with loud applause, but it was difficult to determine whether the applause was due to patriotic fervor or due to the relief that the talk was finally over. I could swear it was the latter that prompted the audience's reaction.

The next speaker was Miss Kalman, the secretary of the local Communist Youth League cell. She spoke about the heroic deeds of the Soviet youth brought up in the spirit of the "Great October." The names of young guerrillas and fliers were mentioned. One name particularly stuck in my memory, that of Zoya Kozmodemyanskaya. A pretty 16-year old high school student from Moscow, she had volunteered to serve with the guerrillas when the Germans were at the gates of Moscow in 1941. During an assignment which involved blowing up an ammunition warehouse in some barn she was caught.

Subjected to terrible tortures by the Gestapo, she divulged neither her name nor the names of her comrades. When at the end of the interrogation the Gestapo man asked: "Where is Stalin?," the girl answered: "At his post!." Next day on the gallows when a soldier put the noose on her neck, Zoya shouted to the peasants who had been brought to witness the hanging: *"Remember Stalin is with you!"* The government awarded her posthumously the title "Hero of the Soviet Union" and gave her mother the badge that goes with the title, a gold star on a small red ribbon. Zoya's mother spoke at various rallies and always repeated how happy she was that her only child gave her life for the country and for Stalin.

Another example quoted by the speaker was the heroic deed of 28 soldiers, members of the Young Communist League. They had defended a sector of the front on the outskirts of Moscow from Guderian's tanks which were trying to break through the defense lines. When reinforcements arrived in the evening, they found 28 dead Red Army men and 15 burned enemy tanks. The soldiers, members of the Communist Youth League, charged the enemy lines yelling "Forward! For the Motherland! For Stalin!" This worship of Stalin and this treatment of him as some deity, this *"Cult of Personality,"* was characteristic of Soviet people's attitude. Another typical attitude of the old peasants toward Stalin was their belief that he did not know how bad off the population was because his advisors were deceiving him and themselves doing harm to the people. It was the same before the revolution when Russian peasantry believed that the tsar did not know anything about their life and needs.

Miss Kalman continued her talk by mentioning the importance of the Communist Youth League's activities on the collective farm and named several boys and girls who had distinguished themselves by their summer work. Finally she closed her talk with three slogans: "Long live the 25th anniversary of the Great October Revolution!", "Long live our Great Leader, Teacher and Father of us all, the Great Stalin!" and "Long live our heroic and invincible Red Army, the army of peasants and workers!" Anna Pavlovna got up from her chair and announced: *"This ends the official part of the meeting. Now we will have the artistic part and dancing."*

The artistic part started with a one-act patriotic play printed in some "Party Activist's Manual" and performed pitifully by the teachers, who were members of the local amateur drama circle. Then a chorus consisting of the same teachers sang a few songs. The songs, as well as their renditions, were very nice. Then the artistic part was over and the dancing began. Our invalid, the admirer of Hanka our cook, played the accordion. Although he played quite well, his repertoire was rather limited: two old tangos, a *krakowiak* (a dance from the Krakow region of Poland), a polka, an oberek (another Polish folk dance), a *pas d'Espagne*, and a few Russian folk dances including the well-known *Yablochko*. There were almost no men and the girls and women danced among themselves. Unquestionably the best dancer was Nina, the millers' daughter. She was the dancer most in demand with the Polish male dancers (the only men around!) which made the other Russian girls jealous. We left the club late that night. All night long all over the village one could hear the drunken voices of farmers celebrating the anniversary of the founding of their "Socialist State." The anniversary was the main reason that vodka had become available in the Selpo store.

Michael attended the beginning of the meeting but then disappeared. My aunt, Steve and I had suspected for some time that Michael had been visiting the physician's assistant. Of course, his private life was none of our business, but the Russians and the Chuvashs began whispering about it which, in a way, demeaned the position of the Polish Embassy's Trustee. Also, after those visits, he always returned to the Home reeking of vodka, and we worried that he might say something inappropriate while under the influence of alcohol. Michael told us that he was visiting the mayors of the neighboring villages to intervene with them about the delivery of firewood to the Home.

November 11 was the 24th anniversary of Poland's regaining independence in 1918. The invalids were in a solemn mood. They wished one another a speedy return to Poland, etc. Dinner was particularly festive but Michael had been gone since the early morning. His way of being the acting director of the Home for Polish Invalids was to be with the physician's assistant in the Chuvash village.

Two days later, on November 13, my uncle returned from Kuibyshev by a bus which he had hired for 600 rubles and brought with him some clothing, the remainder of the food supplies for the last quarter of 1942, including 350 kg (770 pounds) of smoked fish as the substitute for meat. He was accompanied

by a new invalid, *Mr. Formalny*, a somewhat mentally unbalanced individual. Of course, my uncle also brought a lot of news pertaining to the Home; namely:

1. The Polish Embassy had approved the monthly budget of 33,000 rubles for the Home.
2. My uncle brought with him a letter from a provincial office to its district representatives ordering them to sell the Home a horse and the feed for it.
3. The chairman of the *Oblispolkom* (the Provincial Executive Committee) notified the Embassy through his secretary that he would visit the district in the near future and at that time settle once and for all the problems regarding firewood deliveries to the Home.
4. The Embassy had made arrangements to have an old Polish woman transferred from a Soviet old people's home to our Home.
5. My uncle was told to go to *Ulyanovsk* in order to locate several Polish orphans known to be in that city's orphanages and have them transferred to our facility.
6. He was also told to prepare room for several Polish children who were to be transferred to the Home from an orphanage-sanatorium in *Kuibyshev*.

This "Action Children" was the outcome of an agreement between the Soviet government and the Polish Embassy. During the first half of 1942 Polish children, who were in the dormitory in Kuibyshev, as well as those living in the southern part of the Soviet Union were organized into the Youths Corps, similar to cadet schools and evacuated to the Near East and to India. Now the Soviet government had agreed for the facilities operated by the Embassy's Social Welfare Department to take over the remaining children, who possibly at some future date, would also leave for India. Locating these Polish children was very difficult, because the Soviet government, anticipating heavy population losses during the war, did not want to part with them and tried to hide the children with the intention of eventually making Soviet citizens out of them. It was pure chance that the field representatives of the Department were able to find any of these children.

One such "find" occurred during my uncle's stay at the Embassy. One day a small boy dressed in a vocational school's student uniform showed up at the Embassy and demanded to see a staff member. The doorman, *Mr. Leszczynski*, tried to get rid of the boy but the latter was so insistent that the doorman had to give in. After a short while the boy managed to talk his way in to see *Mr. Sroczyński*, the head of the Social Welfare Department. My uncle happened to be in *Mr. Sroczyński's* office and heard the boy's story. His name was *Mendelek*, he was 13 years old and hailed from *Przemysl* where his father was a small businessman. Shortly after the outbreak of German-Soviet hostilities he and his sister, two-years his junior, left *Przemysl* and after some hair raising experiences landed in a sanatorium in *Boyarka*, in Kiev. In that sanatorium there were other Polish children, mainly campers from a summer camp for the children of railroad employees. When the war between Germany and the Soviet Union broke out, the children were loaded onto a train and shipped east. The train, constantly strafed and bombed by German planes, finally arrived in Kiev and the children were placed in a sanatorium in *Boyarka*. They were fed very well and had plenty of sweets and fruit. Soon the advancing German armies threatened Kiev. The children were evacuated to Kuibyshev and placed in an orphanage-sanatorium. They lacked nothing, were clothed and well fed, but after a short period of time the Soviet authorities began sending them, both boys and girls, who were older than 12 years, to vocational schools. Here they encountered the true reality of Soviet life. They slept in filthy surroundings, were poorly fed and worked ten hours a day. Some of them were shipped to munitions factories in Ulyanovsk while others, like *Mendelek*, worked in factories in Kuibyshev. Poor living conditions led to the lowering of moral standards among those boys. They started smoking and drinking, and whenever they had free time, went to the market place where they stole bread, watermelons and anything that was handy. The money they earned was spent on vodka and on gambling at cards. *Mendelek* admitted that he did not squander his earnings, because his younger sister was in a sanatorium, and he brought things for her whenever he visited the sanatorium. He worked as a lathe operator on the night shift, and *Mendelek* visited his sister several times a week. *Mr. Sroczyński* took down the names of all of the Polish children in the sanatorium and the next day fired off a memorandum to the *Narkomindel* (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) about transferring all of those children to the care of the Polish Embassy. *Mendelek* received 150 rubles, a blanket and food products from the warehouse. Then *Mr. Sroczyński* told him: "Take sufficient chocolate to last you until the next time you come. Come back in a few days and we will figure out how to get you, boys, out of those factories," My uncle took the boy with him to dinner in the Embassy's dining hall. After dinner *Mendelek* lit an English cigarette and

said: *"You know, it all seems like a dream. Quite by chance I read in yesterday's newspaper about the existence of a Polish Embassy in Kuibyshev. I was totally unaware of it."* My uncle talked with the little lathe operator for a long time and when they parted, the boy said: *"Sir! Would you please your influence to have the children transferred to the Polish orphanage because when the time comes to return home, they (the Soviets) will not let us return to our parents. I will manage to return but those in the sanatorium are just helpless children."*

During my uncle's stay at the Embassy the subject of the Polish children was discussed on numerous occasions. On the day of my uncle's departure for Sergeyevka, Mendelek showed up with another boy. They wanted to come with my uncle. Mr. Sroczyński explained to them that it would be better if they escaped from the factory after the other children were settled in the Home for Invalids which also would become a Polish orphanage. At the present time their escape would be considered desertion. There would be an official inquiry and a trial with a five-year sentence at hard labor in a prison camp. The boys were given food products and told to return when their supplies ran out. Nevertheless, my uncle did not leave alone. At the very last moment when the engine of the bus was already started and my uncle had settled down next to the driver, the Embassy's doorman, Mr. Leszczyński, ran out of the door holding an older man by the collar of his jacket, shoved him inside the bus on top of baskets full of smoked fish and slammed the bus door. In this way the new invalid, *Mr. Formalny*, arrived at the Home. His last name perfectly fit his demeanor and behavior. *Mr. Formalny* (*formalny* means "formal" in Polish) was an older man with graying hair and a carefully trimmed graying beard. He wore a black quilted jacket, quilted trousers, a brown beret and black socks covered by old rubbers held together with some wire. When he alighted from the bus at the entrance to the Home, he announced to the gathered invalids: *I was insulted terribly. I, a retired Master Sergeant of the Polish Armed Forces had to sit on smoked fish. But God Almighty will forgive them!*" Then he started greeting those standing around individually; first the women and then the men. Every time he saluted smartly and introduced himself: *"I am Formalny, retired Master Sergeant of the Polish Armed Forces."*

During the following days the invalids were busy. They talked about the food supplies and the items of used clothing brought from Kuibyshev, reading and rereading the newspaper published by the Embassy, and discussing whether *Mr. Formalny* was really insane or just feigning. I was interested in the new invalid because of my medical background and engaged him in a conversation. Although he hailed from the Lvov area, he had lived in Krakow before the war. *Mr. Formalny* had a wife, a son and a daughter but had not lived with them. One day when I issued him a set of underware from the warehouse, he refused to sign the receipt. *"My Dear Sir!"* He said to me, *I cannot sign any documents because I have a trustee and I can do only what he tells me to do. Since he is not here, I will not sign anything."* "It took me almost two hours to cajole *Mr. Formalny* into signing the darn receipt but I finally succeeded. My medical curiosity was also satisfied; there was no doubt in my mind that *Mr. Formalny* was insane. His subsequent behavior only confirmed my "diagnosis." When the physician's assistant showed up, *Mr. Formalny* reported to her and asked to have her put Iodine Tincture on his left hand pinky which "was injured by the door of the bus during the trip from Kuibyshev." There was a three-millimeter scratch on his finger which she covered with Iodine Tincture every time she came to the Home. After several weeks *Mr. Formalny* began to complain about general weakness and started dropping his pants in front of the physician's assistant. She blushed, prescribed a better diet and threatened to complain and to resign her position at the Home. There was not much that could be done. As soon as she started seeing patients, *Mr. Formalny* showed up and dropped his pants. Finally, we categorically prohibited him from going to her "office," a corner separated from the rest of the room by two hanging bed sheets.

Every morning I had an unavoidable encounter with *Mr. Formalny*. At 8 o'clock I used to go to the pantry and slice the 400-gm (1 pound) portions of bread which Maria carried into the halls. Since the bread loaves were the same size, in due course I became adept at that routine and was able to cut the proper size portions of bread and meet the 400-gm ration without any small pieces left over. Following the distribution of the bread, *Mr. Formalny* invariably showed up in the pantry and asked to have the weight of his bread ration checked. Also his daily request was for the heel of the loaf with no air space between the crust and the rest of the bread, and the crust was to be neither too well-done nor too soft. His morning visits drove me out of my mind, but I never lost my cool.

Mr. Formalny's other obsession was family names. He nagged me with questions pertaining to my

background and was truly surprised that I did not have a coat-of-arms like all other members of the Polish gentry. One time this obsession caused an incident which kept us laughing for days. Mr. Formalny was talking with Wacław about some family name, when Mr. Borowicz, who, as usual, was lying on his straw mattress, repeated that name imitating Mr. Formalny. The latter turned in Mr. B.'s direction and growled: "Parrot!" Mr. B. did not react but a few minutes later got up from his "bed," approached Mr. Formalny and Wacław, and asked: "Mr. Formalny, have you ever known Mr. Hess?" Mr. F. became very serious and obviously was searching his memory as he repeated the name: "Mr. Hess? Mr. Hess?" At which point Mr. Borowicz said: "Yes, Mr. Hess and you can kiss his ...!" turned around and went back to his straw mattress. Mr. Formalny became furious, turned white and whispered "idiot" through clenched teeth as the rest of the invalids burst out laughing.

Mr. Formalny probably had hundreds of little scraps of paper in the pockets of his quilted jacket which, according to him, were extremely important but which in actuality were meaningless. There were post office receipts for letters mailed to various militia officials regarding a pocket watch and Mr. Formalny's military identification card which had been taken from him at the time of his arrest in 1940. However, the most important one among all those slips of paper was a neatly folded small sheet on which the "retired Master Sergeant" kept a record of how much pension the Polish government owed him because he had not received it since September 1, 1939, the day of the German attack on Poland. Mr. Formalny meticulously kept this record and by the time we returned to Poland in April 1946, 79 months had elapsed since he had received his last payment. In prewar Poland, he would have been due a sizable sum of money, but in 1946, the balance due was maybe sufficient for one month of modest living. I do not know what happened to the "retired Master Sergeant" upon his return to Poland and whether or not he approached the Ministry of National Defense regarding his pension.

At any rate, when in November 1942 Mr. Formalny showed up in the Social Welfare Department of the Polish Embassy on Chapayev Street No. 164 in Kuibyshev, the debt owed to him by the Polish government was 37 months old. One can only imagine the expression on Mr. Sroczyński's (the head of the Department) face when the "client" demanded the pension due him. Since Mr. Formalny refused to understand that at that time the Polish government had more important concerns than a "retired Master Sergeant's pension," he was given 150 rubles, food products and clothes, and was told to return to his domicile. He went to the train station and returned to the Embassy the next morning with a complaint that as a "retired Master Sergeant of the Polish Armed Forces" he had not been provided with a proper military escort. Consequently, he was totally cleaned out in the waiting room at night and now categorically demanded the replacement of his losses. Once again he was given food products but this time he was thrown into the bus for a trip to the Home for Polish Invalids. And so Mr. Formalny increased the number of residents in the Home (or *The Zoo* as we called it) by one.

A few days later the chairman of the Kuibyshev Oblispolkom arrived without announcement in Sergeyevka. He called my uncle and the village mayor, Anna Pavlovna, to her office, ordered her to take care of the delivery of firewood to the Home immediately and to submit a report to his first secretary. In two days that problem was solved. Our collective farm assigned two horses and two sleds to the task, but the drivers were to be supplied by the Home. Mr. Surgiel was to be one of them and the boy, Stasio, volunteered to go with him to drive the second sled. A neighboring collective also sent a horse and a sled whose driver was one of the three newly arrived Poles from Stalingrad (today called *Volgograd*).

One was a tailor and shortly after his arrival started tailoring for all of the farmers, and bartered his services for food by eating throughout the day in those cabins where he worked. The second one worked as the blacksmith's assistant and the third one was assigned to deliver firewood to the Home. Of course, the tailor was best off, whereas the one delivering wood to the Home was the worst off. He was the oldest of the three, short and thickset, and he gave the impression that he was put together from cubes like a little house that children built from wooden blocks. He wore old torn quilted pants, a quilted jacket and bast shoes. His hair looked like a haystack and on top of it he wore a Russian winter cap with earmuffs called *ushanka*. He hailed from one of the little towns in the foot-hills of the Tatra Mountains south of Krakow where he had been a glazier, and he spoke Polish like the highlanders of that region. All of us referred to him by his old trade rather than by his last name. When he used to return from the forest and come into the kitchen for supper, our cook would exclaim: "Oh, my glazier has arrived!" He had a last name, however, and it was *Tanenbaum*. For that reason I called him *Choinka* (pronounced "khoinka")

which in Polish means Christmas tree) and this nickname remained with him. In addition to earning "work-days" from his collective farm, "Choinka" was getting food products from the Home's warehouse, as well as breakfasts and dinners.

Since the number of residents had increased significantly, it became necessary to enlarge the staff by hiring a baker, because the Selpo supplied flour but not bread, a seamstress and a handyman. Those people were brought from collective farms in our district. The baker, Mila, had a blind husband and a little boy who had lost his hearing after contracting the measles. In the collective farm she had worked as a cook for the tractor brigade. Mila was a shrewd and enterprising woman and was nobody's fool. No wonder she brought with her a wagon full of potatoes, several sacks with flour and a lot of clothes. Mila and her family moved into a room next to the kitchen which was already occupied by pani Hanka, the cook, and little Stefanie.

The most difficult problem was getting *Mr. Bazyluk*, the handyman, out of his collective farm's employment. He was an excellent tradesman and, consequently, it took a lot of effort and intervention even at the district level. Finally my uncle secured permission for Mr. Bazyluk and his family, which consisted of his wife and three children, to move to Sergejevka. The Bazyluk family was assigned to the second room in the Kowalski family's cabin. Mr. Bazyluk was to work in the "Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm" and only occasionally at the Home. *Genia* arrived together with the Bazyluk family. She was a seamstress and the daughter of the old lady who prayed all day long. Genia also lived in the village and was not salaried by the Home, therefore, was not considered to be a staff member.

Since there were more people for meals than food rations and since new invalids arrived throughout the month whereas the Selpo issued flour only on the 1st and the 15th of the month, there was usually a shortage of flour at the end of the month. It never happened, however, that the residents did not receive their daily ration of bread in the morning. In order to solve this "flour/bread problem" the Embassy permitted the Home to exchange goods for flour but categorically prohibited the purchase of flour for money at black market prices. The barter was carried out with the miller's wife who gladly exchanged flour for goods. Our residents wanted to be certain that they received the food products which were due them and insisted on their representative being present when the food products were checked out of the pantry and when the meals were prepared. As it turned out they had a good reason for being suspicious because Hanka, the cook, and Mila, the seamstress, were not exactly paragons of honesty. Hanka used to steal various products to feed her admirers, the accordion player and Mr. Kolanko, whereas Mila occasionally swiped some flour or a loaf of bread for her family. In view of this situation the invalids elected *Mr. Sosinski*, who was the quietest and most gentlemanly resident, to be the kitchen supervisor.

Every morning Mr. Sosinski checked out the food products from the pantry for the whole day and carried them to the kitchen where he made sure that they landed in the kettle and not in Hanka's foot locker. Potato peeling was the job of the women invalids. Mentally ill Luba was the "champion potato peeler." Her peels were almost paper thin, and she worked fast and like an automaton. Sometimes, out of sheer boredom, the men would come to peel potatoes. In November they were ousted by the women, because that month many new invalids, both men and women, arrived at the Home and the "potato peeling brigade" could get along without male help. Isaac Sznycer sent another invalid from Petrovka, a woman. *Rebeka* was her name. She was short, dark as a raven and had very short legs. Her husband had remained under the German occupation, several of her children had died in the settlement and the rest had died in the Embassy's dormitory in Kuibyshev. One adopted son had been shipped into the interior of the Soviet Union with her brother-in-law, and she had lost contact with the two of them after the amnesty. The younger adopted son left the Soviet Union with the Polish Youth Corps. Rebeka remained alone and was a nervous wreck. One could not talk about children in her presence because she immediately burst into tears and passed out. In the evenings she liked to reminisce about the old times when she owned a seltzer water factory somewhere in the provinces of Poland. Rebeka spoke very funny Polish mutilating words which made people laugh when she spoke.

One day towards the end of November 1942 when a thick layer of snow covered the ground, two sleighs pulled up to the Home. A woman with a child in her arms and another woman who was very old alighted from the first sleigh. The second sleigh was full of suitcases and bundles. When the second sleigh was unloaded and the new invalids got settled in the women's sleeping hall, my uncle told us their

story. I subsequently heard the same story repeated several times and also recalled it myself.

Before the war the younger woman had been the heroine of a love affair written up the newspapers all over Poland. At that time in the environs of *Grodno*, a small town in the northern part of Poland, there were large lakes full of fish. Several of those lakes were leased to the *Rych* family. Old man *Rych* had died some time before the war and the business was run by his wife and his only daughter, *Leah*. In addition to being in the fish business, the *Rychs* also owned a tavern where *Leah* was the manager and waitress. *Leah* was a girl known throughout the countryside for her beauty, cheerful disposition and sense of humor. The tavern was patronized by the town's "aristocracy" including the police chief. Since there were large forests in that particular part of Poland, the foresters also visited the tavern. Every guest, single or married, young or old, used to make passes at *Leah*, but only one young forester, *Stanislaw*, was lucky enough to meet with *Leah's* reciprocal warm feelings. The only obstacle against their getting married was *Leah's* family. "*Absolutely out of the question.*" was the family's verdict. *Leah, a jewess, marrying a Catholic! Such a scandal in a small town!*" Since the young people were in love "up to their ears," as they used to say in Poland, the family finally agreed under the condition that the young forester not only converted to Judaism but also underwent circumcision. *Stanislaw* traveled to *Lwow* and was circumcised in the clinic of the university. The Polish governmental and the right wing presses were up in arms. *Stanislaw* lost his job as a government forester but was hired by a private landowner. The couple was married and had two sons.

When the Soviets came in 1939 the family, consisting of *Stanislaw*, his wife, two sons and his old mother-in-law, whom *Leah* did not want to leave behind, were exiled to the interior of the Soviet Union because *Stanislaw* was a forester and a former *legionist* (member of Marshal *Pilsudski's* Legion in World War I). The older son died in the settlement and after the amnesty in the summer of 1941, *Stanislaw* immediately went south to join the Polish Army. His wife with her only son and the old mother landed in the Embassy's dormitory. There the whole family converted to Catholicism in order to avoid anti-Semitism expressed by the residents of the dormitory. Their son joined the Polish Youth Corps and was evacuated with it from the Soviet Union. On New Year's Day in 1942, *Leah* gave birth to a baby boy. *Stanislaw* traveled to *Kuibyshev* several times to take his wife and the baby with him when the Polish Army units were leaving the Soviet Union for Iran, but *Leah* did not want to leave her mother behind. The old woman was deaf, senile and 82 years old. "*If your mother is more important to you than your husband, you can stay behind behind!*" were *Stanislaw's* last words. That was in 1942, and *Stanislaw* left with Gen. *Anders' Army*.

As long as the Polish Embassy was in *Kuibyshev*, *Leah* had news from her husband. Later when the Soviet Union broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish Government in London, *Leah* had no news from her husband for more than a year. Then her relatives in Palestine (presently Israel) wrote to her about his visiting them. He never wrote directly to her because he was afraid she would be arrested by the NKVD. Their son, who found himself in *Capetown*, South Africa, corresponded only with his father. He never wrote to his mother or to her family in Palestine because he was ashamed of his Jewish background. For three years *Leah* was not sure whether or not the boy was alive because via the grapevine she had heard that he had died. At the end of 1945 *Stanislaw* sent the boy's snapshot from Palestine which he had received from him. *Leah* showed the photo to everyone whether friend or stranger. In 1946, during the repatriation of Polish exiles, *Leah* returned to Poland with her youngest son and the old senile mother. I suspect that she remained in Upper Silesia where she got off the transport train. Her husband probably remained in the West after the Polish Armed Forces were demobilized in England. Her son probably also remained in the West. This story was just one example of a broken and scattered Polish family, whose members never got back together.

Leah remained beautiful although her experiences took their toll. She was about 38 years old, had a swarthy complexion, a beautifully shaped nose, green eyes and thick greying hair. Her little son, *Georgie*, was a pretty child but sick. He suffered from a chronic defect of the urethra which was rather painful and caused all kinds of rashes on different parts of the child's body because of urinary toxemia. He was high strung and demanding like every sick child. All three of them were accepted into the Home. The grandmother because of her age and condition, *Georgie* as a child, and *Leah*, because she had to take care of her child and her mother and, consequently, could not go to work.

The three of them arrived from a district about 80 km (50 miles) distant from Sergeyevka. After Leah's husband left for Iran with the Polish Army units, she was sent from the Embassy's dormitory to that district because there were already several Polish women there. There was also another reason for having her leave Kuibyshev. Leah used to help one of the clerks in the Embassy pick up the bread and meals for the people in the dormitory. The clerk padded the official roster with some fictitious names, and Leah received the bread for those nonexistent people which she then sold on the black market. She turned the money over to that clerk. Of course, Leah was getting a percentage of the take. After some time the Soviet authorities got wind of this arrangement through their agents among the Poles in the dormitory. The enterprising clerk was afraid of being arrested and, consequently, did not leave the premises of the Embassy until he received an entry visa to Iran when he left the Soviet Union, while Leah was sent away from Kuibyshev. The "bread affair" was seemingly forgotten until three years later when an opportunity arose for the NKVD authorities to resurrect it.

One day the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy sent another invalid, *Mr. Sylwester*, to the Home. His sister worked as a clerk in the Department, and Mr. Sylwester was mentally ill. He was an older man, slept all day long, did not talk to anyone and secretly ate raw potatoes. Because of his condition, Mr. Sylwester was given a chaperon for the trip to Sergeyevka, a woman named Maria, who was also an invalid. She was middle-aged and had owned a farm with her husband around *Luniniec* in Eastern Poland. They were arrested with their five children in February 1940 as "*Polish colonists*" and shipped to a settlement in the northern part of the Soviet Union. After the 1941 amnesty and during the trip south, Maria became ill and had to be left in the nearest hospital while the rest of her family went on. The doctors could not determine what was wrong with her except that her right side had become paralyzed. In due time she regained use of her right side but somehow she had lost her right eyeball and acquired a very serious heart condition. Now all alone and ill Maria arrived in the Embassy. She remained in the dormitory where she worked in the kitchen as a dishwasher. In addition to her official job she also sold food products and clothes for various Embassy clerks on the black market. This way Maria acquired some cash for her services, which enabled her to purchase a wrist watch and ... to smoke Iranian cigarettes. It was typical of all the "ladies" sent from Kuibyshev to the Home: they wore wrist watches and smoked cigarettes. In fact none of them knew how to tell time from a watch and as far as cigarette smoking was concerned one could hardly dream of a prewar Polish peasant woman smoking cigarettes.

Maria was a very pleasant and quiet person, and an excellent cook. Because Michael, the Trustee of the Embassy, became a frequent visitor in the Home because he was bored in Koshki staying at Aunt Tosia's and wanted to be close to his physician's assistant, Shura, it was decided that pani Marysia would cook for us. Needless to say she was very pleased with this turn of events because she loved to cook. She also ate with us and did not have to be limited to invalid rations. She did not exactly follow the rules and regulations in her culinary activities with respect to our family and Michael. It was perfectly legitimate because the new head of the Social Welfare Department had told my uncle during his last visit to the Embassy "not to deny anything for himself or his family." There was another advantage as far as our cook was concerned; she could show Wacław her being partial to him by secretly feeding him with additional food. There was definitely a romance blooming between those two.

One day the stationmaster from Pogruznaya telephoned to let us know that there were three invalids in the waiting room who had gotten off the train and had no means of getting to the Home. Michael immediately went to the administration office of the collective farm and asked that one of the wagons taking grain to the grain elevator brings back the three invalids. That evening the "male group" increased by three people. However, no newly arrived invalids to date made such a shocking impression on the residents as that trio. They arrived from *Syzran* where, after having been released from a hospital, they had been under the personal care of the local Embassy representative. The oldest, over 40 years old, had had half of one foot amputated as the result of frostbite acquired while traveling by train from a prison camp in the Far North. The wound did not heal and he walked on crutches. Each of the other two newcomers was about 23 years old. One was recovering from a paralysis of both of his legs. Now he walked quite well with the help of a cane. The other young man had had both legs amputated just below the knees and moved on his knees equipped with two "pillows" which he had fashioned out of some pieces of cloth and old tires. This young invalid made such a shocking impression on all of the other residents that they seemed to forget their own pains, aches and troubles when they saw this young, intelligent and handsome man without legs. From the very beginning every resident attempted to help him

and make life easier for him. He, himself tried to ignore his condition. Whenever I walked through the men's hall and saw this young invalid walking on his knees, I broke out in cold sweat. We were the same age. At that time none of us, exiles in the Soviet Union, knew anything about what the life under German occupation had been like. I tried to picture the shock of his parents when after the war their only son returned home without either of his legs. Involuntarily I pinched my thigh or moved my toes inside the big felt shoes which I had bought in the "Red Star Collective Farm" before we left for Sergeyevka. Because we left in July, there were plenty of felt boots in the Selpo. That young invalid did not have to worry about felt boots for the winter or shoes and rubbers for the other seasons. I remember him saying: *"I nannot walk on the snow too long because my knees get cold."*

Whenever I had some free time I tried to spend it with the invalids. The young amputee hailed from Krakow and had attended the *Higher Institute of Economics*. He was from a wealthy family and was culturally as well as educationally far above the other residents. No wonder that in the beginning he felt somewhat strange among the others at the Home. Nevertheless, in due time he became friendly with them and particularly with Wacław whose intelligence made him an extremely interesting partner for discussions on many topics.

Once the young amputee related to me, quite matter of factly, how he had lost his legs: *"I was traveling by train in a cattle car from the prison camp in the North to the Polish Army. It was the beginning of February 1942, because we were released very late. It was unbearably cold. I tried to stay awake knowing full well that sleep meant certain death because there was neither an iron stove nor firewood in the car. I fought off sleep for five days and five nights but fell asleep on the sixth day. I came to two months later in a hospital in Syzran without both of my legs. The nurse told me that the staff had lost all hope that I would pull through. I had been unconscious all that time. It will be quite a shock when I return home legless but they will get used to it."*

In the hospital he had met the other two invalids and upon their release the three of them had lived together in some little room. The representative of the Embassy provided them with money, food and clothing on a regular basis. The best organized Embassy representation in all of Kuibyshev province was in Syzran.

Syzran was an industrial city with many plants. These factories employed a very large number of Poles who were either mobilized to the "Work Front" or just hired as members of the work force. The Embassy's representative had an office and employed a secretary as well as several clerks. He was on excellent terms with the Soviet authorities and the NKVD whom he showered with generous "gifts." He had the authority to issue travel passes (*komandirovki*) and in this way shipped hundreds of Poles south to escape the back breaking factory work. This activity was not "appreciated" by the new NKVD authorities sent from Kuibyshev. Consequently, the delegate of the Embassy issued his last *komandirovka* in his own name and went south after having reported to the Department of Social Welfare of the Polish Embassy the reasons for his departure. Several months later he returned to Syzran incognito because "he missed the city." He was immediately arrested and no trace of him was ever found. The Embassy intervened at the Narkomindel (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) but all inquiries remained unanswered. Eventually it was found out through NKVD officials, who at one time or another did favors for the Embassy that the Syzran delegate was not executed but was sentenced instead to a ten-year prison term.

It was the end of November 1942 when the Embassy sent *Stefan* to Sergeyevka and asked Michael, the Embassy's trustee for the Koshki district, to find him some work because he was not an invalid. Stefan arrived at the Embassy from the Far North where, after having been amnestied, he worked as a supply agent for the Regional Food Supply organization. His job required a lot of traveling and in his travels Stefan encountered many prison camps in which Poles were still incarcerated. Stefan dutifully notified the Embassy about his discoveries and the Embassy in turn intervened with the NKVD authorities to have those Polish prisoners immediately released. When the Polish representative's office in that region was closed, the NKVD started looking for Stefan. He escaped to Kuibyshev where thanks to intervention on his behalf by some relatives of the Polish Ambassador, Tadeusz Romer, whom Stefan had met in the Far North, the Embassy sent him to Sergeyevka. At least that was Stefan's story.

We suspected that Stefan must have done some unsavory things including black marketeering which forced him to change his surroundings in order to avoid free lodging in the nearest prison courtesy of the local NKVD. Be that it may, Stefan was temporarily put up at the Zelmanskis' and became the tutor for the group of boys who arrived with a group of children from a sanatorium. He also helped around the Home, played the accordion in the club and flirted with Roza Kalman, the local Young Communist League (*Komsomo*) cell secretary, whenever there was an opportunity. In spite of the fact that it was winter and not spring when the sap usually rises, flirting was a common pastime.

The second most desirable girl to flirt with was Nina, the miller's daughter, who became Franek Kowalski's object of admiration. Rightly or wrongly Franek suspected that his only serious competitor was Steve, the household manager of the Home. After a party in the club, when Steve danced with Nina a great deal, Franek jumped Steve outside the club. They rolled in the snow and pummeled one another for some time until Izrael and Bazyli separated the two of them. Undoubtedly, as far as Nina was concerned Franek could not hold a candle to Steve, who was educated and was good on the dance floor. Poor Franek was neither. Outside of Nina and Roza Kalman there were no "desirable" girls left in the village. Valya, the school principal's sister, was drafted into the Red Army and the rest were just peasant girls.

By the end of November the Russian winter was in full swing. My uncle traveled to Koshki several times regarding food supplies, firewood and the purchase of a horse for the Home. Food deliveries were no particular problem thanks to the cooperation of the *Raipotrebsoyuz* chairman, Ivan Pavlovich. The problem of the firewood deliveries was more or less under control. From time to time a few neighboring collective farms delivered several sledloads of wood, and every day "*Christmas Tree*" Tanenbaum, Surgiel and Stasio brought two sleds loaded with firewood.

Once my uncle returned from Koshki with a big smile on his face. He had received permission from the district office in charge of collecting taxes in goods rather than in money for the purchase of a horse from our collective farm. The next morning my uncle went to the farm's office to inform the chairman about it. Despite all of the documents and orders from the district office, Sergey Stepanovich refused to sell the Home a horse, explaining that only the executive board of the collective farm could make such a decision. There were many people in the office, and it was difficult to discuss anything with the chairman. My uncle invited him for the evening tea to the house. That evening the "*Goat*" promptly showed up. Of course, a half-liter of vodka instead of tea, and bread, cold cuts and pickles instead of cookies were on the table. Sergey Stepanovich brought with him the senior foreman, *Uncle Misha*, whose opinion he valued. Uncle Misha just loved to drink, so it was no wonder that his eyes just sparkled at the sight of the vodka. My uncle could only drink a few drops of vodka, because he was in poor health and had only one kidney. He left it to me to keep up with the guests as the "representative of the Polish Home for Invalids." We emptied the half-liter of vodka and another full liter, and were told to come the next day to the stable to select a horse and to sign the sale and purchase documents for the beast.

The next morning my uncle showed up at the stable with his "retinue" consisting of Steve, Surgiel, Bazyli, two invalids and little Stasio, all horse experts. They actually had little choice. Among the four horses presented to them one was old and blind, the second one was old and lame and the third one was old, blind and lame. Our "experts" selected the fourth horse which was only old. His name was *Mishka II* and according to his papers he was 23 years old. The invalids familiar with horses could not decide whether Mishka was 28 years or 33 years old. Not only did he have old and yellow teeth, a sure sign of any horse's advanced age but he was also missing many teeth which underscored Methuselah's age for a horse. At any rate, Mishka was probably the best specimen from the group of horse-invalids in the stable of the "Roza Luxemburg Collective Farm." That afternoon I drafted two documents: one for the sale of Mishka II by the collective and the other one for the purchase of the horse by the Home, each document in triplicate (with no carbon paper available!). The horse was purchased for 1850 rubles cash. On the basis of the document pertaining to the sale of the horse, the collective farm was also supposed to sell a sufficient quantity of hay to last Mishka until the spring when the meadows would become his source of food. Of course, the directive regarding the sale of hay would have been ignored if the "Goat" had not received some chocolates for his little granddaughter and if the senior foreman had not received a pair of trousers for his little son.

The problem of picking up the oats at the grain elevator in Pogruznaya was a minor one in

comparison with the other problems such as acquiring a harness, a sled and a stable boy. In the Soviet Union one could not go to a store and purchase a harness or a sled. The acquisition of anything required countless papers, documents, orders, directives, etc. so we temporarily borrowed a harness and a sled from the collective until my uncle went to Koshki where the saddlers' cooperative was located. The cooperative could not accept any orders because of unavailability of leather. However, in the course of my uncle's conversation with the director and the shop manager, they solved this problem when my uncle promised a blanket for the director and a pair of trousers for the shop manager. Both gifts were from the foreign supplies. In a week the harness was ready and at the established government price: 168 rubles. The director of the cooperative and the shop manager received the promised gifts and everybody was happy.

The only remaining item to be acquired for our "Transportation Department" was a sled. Thanks to Ivan Pavlovich, chairman of the *Raipotrbsoyuz*. My uncle received a letter from the Raipotrebsoyuz to the *Lespromkom* (Forest Industry Factories) in Salavan asking them to sell two sleds to "*an institution of the Polish Embassy*." The next morning Steve, our household manager, went to Salavan equipped with two 200-gram (½ pound) packages of the best Russian tobacco, *Kazbek*. He returned that evening towing behind his sled two brand new sleds. *There would have been no sleds without that tobacco.*" He said laughing.

During his last visit to Kuibyshev my uncle was able to get 20 kg (44 pounds) of tobacco from the provincial food supply office; i.e. 100 20-gram packages and 200 5-gram packages of tea; i.e. 1 kg. (about 2 pounds). The tobacco was distributed from time to time among the residents, each smoker getting one-half of a package. The tea went to the kitchen. Tobacco and tea were extremely useful commodities for "expressing appreciation" in various situations such as the delivery of firewood or potatoes to the Home. Since the collective farms charged with these duties were primarily inhabited by Tartars, a package of tobacco or tea given to the drivers or to the chairman of the collective was helpful in expediting things. Especially the tobacco, which was called "*moss*," was a treat for any cigarette smoker who otherwise had to rely on *makhorka* home grown chopped up dried tobacco plants, for satisfying his habit.

Things were now under control: the Home owned a horse and two sleds; the firewood supply was assured; and food reserves were in the larder. My uncle decided to travel to Ulyanovsk in order to find the Polish children in that city's orphanages and to bring with him back to the Home an old Polish woman from a Soviet old people's home located 70 km (approximately 45 miles) from Ulyanovsk. My uncle selected a young resident, *Henryk*, to be the chaperon. Henryk, a 20-year old boy, had been sent from Melekes by Mr. Kochanski, at the time when the latter had represented the Embassy in that city. Henryk did not look like there was anything wrong with him. He was tall, big, with rosy cheeks, a true picture of health. Although the Russians scoffed (*Also an invalid?! Healthy like a horse! And that complexion!*), Henryk's looks were deceiving. He had a very serious heart condition, something wrong with his lungs, chronic malaria and glandular problems. Henryk acquired all of these conditions in prison after having been arrested in the camp settlement for telling people to stay away from work on November 11, 1941, the 23rd anniversary of Poland's independence. He was finally released from prison in February of 1942 but lost contact with his brother and the rest of the family who had also been arrested at the same time as he.

In the Home Henryk became enamoured with our baker, Mila, the wife of the blind invalid. The blind husband sensed the love affair between the two. He remembered that the age difference between him and his wife was 16 years, and he also remembered her habits before he lost his sight. Once when Mila and Henryk were in the kitchen (their usual meeting place was a small stable where the only witness was Mishka II), the blind man jumped down from the Russian stove where he had been chopping tobacco in a wooden trough with a small ax and wanted to hack his wife and Henryk using the same ax. The lovers beat a hasty retreat, and the cook disarmed the jealous husband.

At this point in time, for the "lover boy" Henryk, being away from Mila, was "just what the doctor ordered," so Michael and my uncle supplied him with proper travel documents. My uncle also decided to stop in Melekes and pay Mr. Dunin, Mr. Kochanski and the new Embassy Representative a visit. Supplied with bread, a jar of clarified butter, a few fish, and with tobacco and tea to be used as "gifts" on

the trip, my uncle and Henryk were driven by Surgiel to the Pogruznaya railroad station. Michael was to run the Home during the few days of my uncle's absence. Actually there was nothing for him to do. Everything was organized and the institution operated smoothly. It was true that there were no beds, an insufficient amount of underclothes and clothing, and there were lice all over the place, but people were warm and fed. For breakfast each resident received bread, a piece of butter, half of a fish and sweetened tea or coffee with milk. Dinner consisted of soup, mashed potatoes or turnips with gravy and a piece of meat. For supper there was again soup. The portions were not excessive but considering the conditions brought about by the war in the Soviet Union when people were starving to death in many areas, the Home was a Godsend for those in it.

One evening during my uncle's absence two new women invalids arrived at the Home. One was hunch-backed and hailed from the *Lvov Province* where she had lived with her husband and several daughters. She used to sell beads, brooches, scarves and other trinkets at country fairs and town markets. She was illiterate but spoke Polish, Ukrainian and Yiddish. Right away she asked to be called by her first name "*Madam Justinka*" She arrived with a young and pretty girl, *Marysia*. Madame Justinka doted over Marysia like over her own daughter. They had roomed together in *Timashevo*, in the Kuibyshev Province, where Madame Justinka earned money by fortune telling while Marysia worked in a sugar refinery. Once, while carrying a sack with sugar, Marysia strained herself and could not do heavy physical work anymore. I could not figure it out why Madame Justinka and Marysia had been exiled in the interior of the Soviet Union.

Later that evening little Stasio knocked on the door to our quarters with a message from Madame Justinka. She asked my aunt and me to come and see her. We went through the men's area and into a small room occupied by several women among them the mentally ill Luba and Leah with her Georgie and her old mother. The two newly arrived women got settled in that room. When we entered, the room was half-dark. A kerosine lamp without the glass chimney stood in the center of the table and was spewing so much smoke and soot into the air that Madame Justinka's nostrils and those of several women sitting around the table resembled coal mine shafts. An almost empty bottle of vodka and a few empty cups stood near the lamp.

As soon as we came in, Madame Justinka ordered Marysia to take another bottle of vodka from the foot locker, poured everyone about three-quarters of a cup and raising her cup delivered a short speech in which she extolled the help provided by the Embassy and by the Home for Polish Invalids, praised my uncle's unselfish devotion to his job and cursed the Soviet Union and the Russians using the most elaborate swear words. The poor woman was already pretty high. It was impossible to tell when and how the party would have ended or how many more bottles of vodka Marysia would have taken from the seemingly bottomless foot locker if it were not for "Crazy Luba." The previous day she had had a fit and since that time she had laid on her straw mattress with a towel or a sweater tied around her head, alternately moaning or dozing off. All through the evening she was quiet but the gay mood of the drunken women must have gotten to her, because suddenly she jumped from her mattress, began yelling "*Mommy! Mommy!*" and launched herself at the nearest woman. The other women just froze. Wacław, Steve and little Stasio ran in from the men's area and with Leah's help tied Luba up with some towels and put her back on her straw mattress. When my aunt and I returned to our quarters, we found Kathy in tears. Crying her heart out she said between sobs: *You are drunk and making a lot of noise.*" It took a great deal of effort to calm her down and put her back to sleep. The child had a complex about vodka and drunks. Before the war my aunt and uncle had lived in an apartment near the plant in which he was employed as the chief engineer. After each pay day the workers got drunk and started fights, and Kathy remembered this very well.

Several days later my uncle returned from Ulyanovsk and, per usual, had a lot of interesting stories to tell. On the way to Ulyanovsk he and Henryk had stopped in Melekess for a day where my uncle was warmly welcomed by Mr. Dunin and his other acquaintances. The Dunins were doing allright. He ran the house while she earned money by sewing and fortune telling. From Melekess my uncle and Henryk went to Ulyanovsk. Henryk left to fetch the old Polish woman from the Soviet old people's home, while my uncle got busy tracking down the Polish children in Soviet orphanages. A special office called *Detpriyomnik*, which processed children found in the streets, brought them in and then shipped to orphanages, gave my uncle information on and the addresses of five little Polish children. This office also

supplied him with the proper documents concerning those children for forwarding to the Embassy.

During those several days in Ulyanovsk my uncle stayed with the relatives of the director of the saddlers' cooperative in Koshki where the harness for Mishka II had been made. The family consisted of six adults and children, and lived in one room with a small kitchen. My uncle brought them several smoked fish, some soap and tobacco as favors for putting him up. His hosts were very pleasant and good-hearted. They were grateful beyond description for the gifts. There were two sisters in that family and one of them was married to a staff member at the Soviet Embassy in Berlin. When the war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, the Soviet Embassy staff with their dependents returned to the Soviet Union through Turkey. She related to my uncle how the declaration of war by Germany against the Soviet Union was executed at the diplomatic level.

According to the stories circulating among the staff of the Soviet Embassy in Berlin, the Soviet ambassador, *Dekanozov*, was called to the German Foreign Ministry early in the morning on June 22, 1941. Upon his arrival, he was immediately ushered into the office of Foreign Minister *Ribbentrop*. The minister, standing behind his massive desk, greeted the ambassador with a nod of his head rather than with the customary handshake. Without asking his visitor to sit down, Ribbentrop said looking at his wrist watch: *"Excellency! At this moment German armies are crossing the German-Soviet frontier and starting military action against the country which you represent. Your passport as well as those of your staff and their dependents will be returned and you will be delivered to the border. Goodbye."* The minister again nodded his head and watched the expression on the face of the ambassador and his overall reaction. Dekanozov stood with his back to a wall which had several doors. He had entered the office through one of them and now, if he left through a different door, it would mean he had lost his cool. But Dekanozov left Ribbentrop's office through the same door through he had entered it a short while before.

It was decided that Marysia, who had arrived with Madame Justinka, would work in the kitchen as our cook's helper. A few days after my uncle's return Henryk returned with the old woman, *Mrs. Kuzmicka*, and her belongings which mostly consisted of bottles and rags. She was known in the Embassy's dormitory for her compulsive collecting of old things and bottles. The first evening of her arrival she cried from sheer joy: *Finally I am among my own. And I thought I would have to die here."* The next morning she came to my uncle and asked him to find the addresses of her three great-grandsons and two great-granddaughters. The boys served with the Polish Air Force in Great Britain and the girls had left the Soviet Union with Gen. Anders' Polish Army units. "Grandma" Kuzmicka's sons and grandsons had not been exiled to the interior of the Soviet Union and here again was one of those incongruous situations. What threat did an 82-year old woman present to the Soviet authorities that it was necessary to send her to the Far North?

In the beginning of December 1942 a young man, about 23 years old, arrived at the Home. *Maks* was from *Lodz*, the center of the Polish textile industry, who, until recently lived in *Alma-Ata*, the capital of *Kazakh S.S.R.* in Central Asia. When the Polish Embassy representative was arrested and sentenced to a ten-year prison term, Maks, a close associate of the representative, had to skip town and then the province because the NKVD was also looking for him. Whether Maks was a "close associate" of the Embassy representative or had nothing at all to do with that office and what his past was, we were never able to find out. Maks lied through his teeth and told a different story every time. He had all kinds of affidavits from various places of his past employment attesting to the fact that he had worked as a physician's assistant and even as a scientist on the staff of the *Ukrainian Geological Institute* but "somewhere he had lost" his amnesty certificate. Maks also claimed that he had been a second year medical student in Italy. Unfortunately, no one in *Sergeyevka* could check Maks' knowledge of foreign languages, although a few weeks later I had the opportunity to test his general intelligence. By that time the children had arrived from *Kuibyshev*, as well as the boys from the factories including *Mendelek*. The local newspaper, the "*Volga Commune*," carried an article commemorating some anniversary of the birth or death of *Newton*. Maks happened to be in the boys quarters and they asked him who *Newton* was. He could not answer, and they came to me with the question because "*Pan Maks did not know who Newton was.*" Maks lived with *Roza*, *Izrael* and *David*, and started working in the collective farm carting grain to the elevator or firewood from the forest.

As there no longer seemed to be any need for my uncle to travel to the Embassy, he decided to

devote all of his attention and efforts toward improving the conditions in the Home. Winter was in full swing by now, and it was imperative that he assured the constant delivery of firewood to the Home. The firewood consumption was one sled; i.e. 0.5 cubic meters (yards) per day. This increased to two sleds daily as the severe Russian winter set in and more children arrived. After all, our building was old and poorly insulated for the subzero temperatures.

Although we had never been without firewood, little Stasio suffered frostbite of the toes on one foot. He wore ordinary shoes since the Embassy did not permit to purchase for anyone winter felt shoes (*valenki*) on the black market. Eventually we were able to barter some clothes for *valenki* for Stasio, but it was already too late. Henio, who brought old Mrs. Kuzmicka, was placed in charge of Home's horse and sleds, but could not travel to the forest because of his numerous illnesses.

At this point our collective farm offered to assign to the Home three horses with sleds every day but without drivers. *"You have plenty of men there who are strong like oxen."* Sergey Stepanovich, collective's chairman used to say. *"They can ride to the forest."* We wanted to utilize all three sleds and horses, a sizable brigade with our Mishka II. My uncle arranged for one of the Polish boys working for the collective farm to be released from work there, and he was hired as Mishka II's permanent master. The other three sleds or wagons (depending on the condition of the roads) were driven by Maks, Surgiel and a new invalid from Petrovka, who suffered from bone tuberculosis. Thus the fuel problem was finally solved.

Another urgent problem had to do with the laundry. The women did their own laundering but for the men a laundress was needed. Since the Bazyluk family brought an orphaned teenager and her dwarf-sister with them, the sister was admitted to the Home and the girl was hired as a laundress. Of course, she could not manage to do everything herself, so the women helped her.

The men, on the other hand, showed total lack of understanding of the Home's overall situation. They never volunteered to saw or chop firewood, or to carry water to the kitchen or to the laundry, but they were always ready to eat and hurried to the dining hall for every meal. Finally my uncle called a meeting of the residents and "read them the riot act,": *"Certain basic things in the Home, which are not taxing, have to be done by the invalids for their own good and benefit because the Polish Embassy cannot hire and keep on the Home's payroll more than eight people. Nor it is possible to hire additional personnel on a 33,000 ruble monthly budget. The residents must organize the sawing, chopping and bringing of firewood for the stoves as well as bringing water for the kitchen and for the laundry. Otherwise it will be cold in the rooms and there will be no meals!"* This announcement by the director was seconded by Michael, the Embassy's trustee, and brought about a heated discussion and a storm of protests. The residents felt that the Department of Social Welfare of the Polish Embassy had to provide everything for them because they were entitled to it.

After some bargaining these problems were solved. Wacław and our baker's blind husband agreed to saw and chop firewood in exchange for double servings of food and a 50 percent increase in their bread ration. The latter condition as well as additional bread rations for those bringing wood from the forest, who had to stay overnight in Salavan, because days became too short for a round trip, required exchanging various items of clothing for flour at the mill. Other duties; e.g. carrying of water for the kitchen and for the laundry, the invalids arranged among themselves. These attitudes illustrate utter laziness and moral decay of people who forgot how to support themselves by working and expected to have everything provided. Similar attitudes were observed in displaced persons camps in Germany after the end of World War II when the inmates refused to do anything even if it was for their own good and comfort.

On December 13th a cable arrived from the Department of Social Welfare of the Polish Embassy notifying my uncle to expect the arrival of 19 children from Kuibyshev on December 17. We had four days to make the necessary preparations for their arrival. Michael, who had received a copy of the cable, came on foot that afternoon from Koshki to Sergeyevka. He was all excited and full of stupid (as usual!) ideas and plans. Again my uncle called a meeting of all of the residents to establish a new assignment of living space. The large hall next to our room was designated for the girls. The room next to it was assigned to the women. Of the two remaining rooms, one was assigned to the men and the other one to the boys and young invalids. In the hallway between the large hall and the storeroom was the "bathroom." Its "fixtures"

consisted of three sheet metal containers hanging on the wall for water, each with a push valve at the bottom, and three sheet metal wash basins on a bench under each *umyvalnik*. These *umyvalniks* were familiar to us from our labor camp days. Because of the large number of residents and the expected increase in the Home's population on account of the children from Kuibyshev, it became imperative to appoint a person to be responsible for assuring some cleanliness and order in this primitive bathroom. The residents selected *Mr. Czeslaw*, the master of "unknitting" old socks into threads, of making clothes patches with artistically embroidered designs and initials, and a collector of empty match boxes. The new "official" took his job very seriously and was extremely meticulous in executing his duties. Consequently, every morning the bathroom was a scene of quarrels and brawls, and constant complaints about *Mr. Czeslaw* were brought to my uncle's attention who had to smooth things out.

The reasons for this were utterly ridiculous. As soon as the invalids came to wash up, *Mr. Czeslaw*, armed with a rag, took up a position at one end of the little hallway and watched them. He categorically forbade the excessive use of water and as soon as a few drops of water landed on the floor, *Mr. Czeslaw* ran up and wiped them with his rag. Anyone who had had the experience of washing up under the "patented Soviet *umyvalnik*" could not avoid spilling some water on the floor. Consequently, *Mr. Czeslaw* constantly circulated among the three washing individuals interfering with their morning ablutions. They, in turn, did not spare some pretty nasty remarks thrown in his direction. When *Mr. Czeslaw* ordered the men to take off their shirts and wash their necks while the temperature in the "bathroom" was just slightly above freezing, all hell broke loose and frequently ended with a brawl. After the boys arrived, it was *Mr. Czeslaw's* turn to come to my uncle or to me with complaints. To spite the "bathroom manager" the boys splashed one another and got *Mr. Czeslaw* soaked at the same time. One day when he really got under their skins, they threw a towel over his head to cover his eyes and whacked him with the wet rag he used for mopping floor.

The job of stoking the stoves was given to a new invalid by the name of *Jozef*. He arrived shortly before the children from a prison where he had spent a year for theft while working on a collective farm after the 1941 amnesty. In the winter of 1940 *Jozef* escaped from the prison camp with two of his buddies. On the second day of their wanderings through the snow covered countryside, they were tracked down by the NKVD troopers with dogs. Although the fugitives stood with their hands raised above their heads and were surrounded by dogs, the approaching soldiers started shooting at them. One of the men was killed, the other one was shot in the hip and *Jozef* was shot through his right wrist. Then the troopers marched them the 40 km (25 miles) back to the camp. The bullet had shattered *Jozef's* wrist bones and his wrist was permanently fixed at a right angle to his forearm. After listening to *Jozef's* story my uncle said: "I hope you will not steal in the Home for Polish Invalids." *Jozef* started crying and begged my uncle not to turn him away. He was so emaciated that his bones seemed to be poking holes through his skin.

With the significant increase in the population of the Home, the problem of a latrine was the most pressing one. Approximately 10 yards from the Home was a wooden shack over a large hole dug out in the ground. The hole was covered with boards in which round openings were cut out. It was a typical village outhouse like the ones frequently encountered in Soviet cities and towns. However, the hole was not dug to the center of the planet Earth but much shallower and it did not take long for it to fill with human excrement "to the brim." Since the temperatures stayed well below freezing and people had to continue going to the bathroom, the feces froze into small pyramids. Snow blew inside the shack through gaps between boards and the inside of the outhouse resembled a miniature mountain range of the *Tatras*, the *Alps* or the *Rockies*. Finally, "the mountains" became so high, that they formed a wall and the invalids had to scale it to defecate. Some were too lazy to go to the outhouse even when there were no fecal "mountain ranges" inside and went to the bathroom under the windows of our building irrespective of the time of the day. No admonishing or shaming of the culprits did any good. The invalid most frequently caught by my uncle with "his pants down" (not necessarily figuratively speaking!) was the little waiter from the cafe-restaurant "*Cyganeria*" in Krakow. "*I cannot get there in time, Sir. My word of honor I can't make it.*" He told my uncle while standing in front of him with a frightened expression on his face and unbuttoned pants. At the next meeting of the residents my uncle announced that as a form of punishment *Mr. Adler* was appointed "*Director of the Domestic Hygiene Institute.*" He was charged with breaking up the "mountain ranges" using a crowbar and throwing the debris outside so that the latrine could be used again. The waiter accepted his punishment docilely and tackled the work with so much energy and

enthusiasm that at the next meeting Michael, the Embassy's trustee, who felt the need to make a speech, publicly praised Mr. Adler for his superb work in the latrine.

The Children

On the day before the arrival of the children, Michael had a telephone conversation with the Embassy and was informed that the children would arrive the next day. He immediately phoned Sergeyevka to let us know that he would meet the children at the Pogruznaya railroad station and that we should ask the collective farm's chairman to send a few sleds for them. Stepan Sergeyevich refused explaining that there were no horses available at the time. The three sleds used for carting firewood for the Home remained overnight in Salavan. The only solution was to hitch Mishka II and send Henryk to the station so that at least the children's luggage could be brought to Sergeyevka.

The next day the excitement began in the early morning. The hall assigned to the girls was swept, the floor washed, mattresses spread out to be later filled with straw which Bazyli brought from the field on a broken sled pulled by a blind horse. We tried to have Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, talk to Stepan Sergeyevich about the sleds but she just said: *"It is only 12 km (7.5 miles). Not far at all and better for the children to walk. They will only freeze sitting on the sleds."* There was no point in discussing the matter any further. It was like talking to a wall. At noon Michael let us know by phone that the children had arrived: 14 girls and three boys chaperoned by a nanny and a teacher who were both Russian, and that they were starting for Sergeyevka. Now the Home buzzed like a beehive. The topic of the children was on everybody's lips. Rebecca, Leah, Maria and the other women whose children had either died or left for Iran were trying to hide their tears.

A few minutes after 4:00 p.m. Michael marched into the building at the head of the column of children. They were very tired but looked good. What shocked everyone initially was the realization that these children, who were Polish children, spoke only Russian. That evening when they had rested the children started comparing the Home to the sanatorium in which they had lived. Only children can be so ruthlessly critical! They criticized everything including the food, the lack of beds, the sanitary conditions, etc. They were suspicious of the invalids and staff who spoke Polish to them and did not let go of their nanny or their teacher even for a moment. When these two were eating supper in our room, the girls locked the doors of their quarters and would not let any of the women- residents in.

Needless to say the children did not endear themselves to the adults who had not expected such behavior. The adult invalids obviously expected to encounter a strongly developed Polish patriotism and expected the children to be happy about having been brought to a Polish Home for Invalids and Orphans, even though the conditions in it were much worse than those in the Soviet sanatorium. What the adults did not understand was that the children were only children (the oldest was 13 and the youngest 9). They had spent 1.5 years in the Soviet Union, and three years of Soviet indoctrination and education since the occupation of the eastern territories of Poland by the Soviets on September 17, 1939, had left its mark. For these children their homeland was Russia and the greatest human being was Stalin. They knew the history of the 1917 revolution by heart as well as Soviet poems and songs. But the most upsetting thing, especially to the old women and young believers, was that the children did not say any prayers because *"God does not exist"* and *"religion is the opium of the masses."* This "generation gap" increased when the older boys, Mendelek among them, began arriving some time later, after having deserted their factory jobs. And this "generation gap" remained until our repatriation to Poland.

There was another important reason for the hostility between the adult residents and the children. The adolescents and especially the adolescent boys who grew up under adverse Soviet conditions developed habits such as stealing, horniness, etc. which the adults in the Home did not understand. Furthermore, none of the invalids could serve as a model for these youngsters or impress them especially since the older boys frequently came from a "rich" past. Consequently, the residents were just laughingstock for the boys who subjected them to jokes, pranks, etc. The only people the boys respected were my uncle, because of his position as director of the institution and because of his friendly way with people, my aunt, whom they feared because she always disciplined Kathy and frequently had her in tears, Steve, who was the boys' tutor, and myself, because I was always able to answer their questions and chat with them on various subjects. Actually, they treated Steve like an older buddy lathe operator or a foreman. Of the invalids, the only two respected by the boys were Wacław, who always cracked jokes and told funny stories, and the young amputee, who walked on his knees and whom they treated as an equal, perhaps because he was their height.

Two days later the girls hysterically bid tearful farewells to their two Russian chaperons and then walked around all day long with red eyes from crying. In the meantime the Home started making preparations for celebrating Christmas. It was decided to have the traditional Polish "Wigilia" (Christmas Eve Supper), within our limited means, but with fish, noodles and...vodka.

Two days before "Wigilia" the first two "deserters" from a plant in Kuibyshev's suburb of Bezimianka arrived at the Home. They were 14 years old and traveled by train underneath benches in car compartments and on lorries loaded with coal. The sister of one of them was among the girls brought from the sanatorium and she immediately hung onto her brother's neck. In the next day two more boys, brothers, showed up. Two of the girls felt desolate and secretly cried. One was Gusta, Mendelek's younger sister, and the other one was Halina, whose brother worked in a factory in Ulyanovsk. There was another person who worried about Mendelek; namely my uncle. He had met the boy in the Polish Embassy and took a liking to him. The two brothers reported that they had traveled with Mendelek but when railroad militiamen entered their car, the boys ran and Mendelek got separated from the two of them. This was bad news because if the boy were caught, he would be sentenced to five years at hard labor in a prison camp despite his 13 years. For the present, however, the residents and staff of the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans had something else on their minds: Christmas Eve Supper.

In the dining hall the stove was stoked and the ceiling was wiped off, because the steam from the kettles in the kitchen next door had condensed on the ceiling and dripped onto the tables and the heads of those sitting at the tables. The tables, which were covered with white sheets and decorated with pine branches, were arranged in a horseshoe. In the corner of the room stood a Christmas tree, which was actually the tip of a pine tree brought by Maks from the forest. The children decorated it with ornaments and chains fashioned by from old newspapers. At 6 o'clock all of the residents and staff gathered at the tables. Pancakes made out of flour and water were served as substitutes for the traditional Christmas wafers (oplatki). My aunt and uncle sat at the head table with the oldest women residents on either side. The other residents sat next and at the two ends of the horseshoe sat the children under the watchful eye of Stefan, their new tutor. In his new position Stefan did not draw any salary but had all his meals at the Home. Since he occasionally helped in the collective farm's smithy or carpentry shop, our village mayor agreed to place him on the roster of evacuees, which entitled Stefan to receive 5 kg (11 pounds) of flour monthly from the Selpo. Father Oszmianski said a short prayer in the ancient Church Slavonic language and the people started sharing the "wafers" and wishing one another a quick end to the war and a safe return to their Homeland. An old toothless and lisping woman thanked the Embassy and the Home's director for their concern for the welfare of Polish invalids and orphans, and for their Herculean efforts to provide the residents with the best care under the most difficult of circumstances.

The meal consisted of smoked fish, noodles with sugar, an additional ration of bread with butter and coffee with milk and sugar. Each invalid also received 50 grams (almost 2 ounces) of vodka. Since we did not want the children to feel left out, their vodka was sweetened with honey and each child received 25 grams (almost an ounce) of it. What we did not take into account was that vodka with honey is sweeter than vodka without honey but it is not weaker; on the contrary, it seemed to be stronger. Consequently, the children got high. Some laughed and others cried. My little cousin, Kathy, became a ringleader among the girls as the result of having unexpectedly acquired so many playmates. Toward the end of the evening in the proper spirit, we dressed Mr. Kozuch as Santa Claus, and made him distribute Christmas gifts to the children: 100 grams (over 3 ounces) of hard candy and a few chocolates per child. The happiness of our new little residents knew no bounds and there was no end to the squealing, laughter and noise.

Late in the afternoon on Christmas Day, Mendelek showed up. The children were ecstatic. We sensed that he was like an older brother or a guardian to them. After all, they had known him from Kuibyshev when he used to visit his sister, Gusta, in the sanatorium where he always brought some "goodies" not only for her but also for the other children. My uncle was no less happy than the children to see Mendelek. He picked him up and kissed him on both cheeks. The boy was frozen stiff and Franek Kowalski, who had brought him from the railroad station, managed to warm the boy up a bit by rubbing his frozen hands and feet in the stable foreman's little cell. Mendelek wore only thin gloves and ordinary shoes with rubber soles which he had received from the Embassy. After our hero warmed up, ate and rested, he was subjected to a barrage of questions pertaining primarily to his late arrival in the Home. It

turned out that he was the last one to leave Kuibyshev, because he wanted to be sure that all of the others had safely gone on their way. First he arranged with the Polish Embassy to have the girls shipped out of the Soviet sanatorium. Then he dispatched four colleagues, and left together with the last pair himself. However, on the train when the militiamen were checking documents, he was arrested and placed in their compartment to be handed over to the NKVD at the nearest larger station. At some small stop Mendelek outwitted his captors and escaped. After a few hours he got onto a loaded flatcar of a train which stopped on a siding to let a train going in opposite direction pass because it was a single track line. He spent a whole night traveling on that flatcar and the next morning got off at Pogruznaya station. In spite of the fact that Mendelek missed Christmas Eve, he received his ration of hard candy and chocolates. His sister also managed to share her ration with him.

That evening the miller, Aunt Masha, his wife, Nina and Lisa came to the Home to celebrate Christmas with us. In addition to our family there were Steve, Stefan the accordionist, and Michael. Of course, we served vodka and beer (especially for Aunt Masha) with some "appetizers," smoked fish and a relatively fancy supper prepared by our cook, pani Marysia. We partied all evening long, singing to the sound of the guitars played by Nina and Lisa and dancing to the accordion played by Stefan.

However, right after the holidays a tragedy struck. One of the girls died following a middle ear infection which started on the day of her arrival. Actually, all of the children were in poor health. Many had lung infections while others had swollen and infected glands. For these reasons they had been selected to attend summer camps in 1941 and then, following the evacuation of those camps into the interior of the Soviet Union, were kept in a sanatorium. During their trip to the Home and particularly during their march from the train station to Sergeyevka several children caught colds despite their warm clothes. The sanatorium outfitted the children with underwear, dresses and shoes. Furthermore, before their departure from Kuibyshev, the children, as well as their two Russian chaperons, visited the Polish Embassy where they were treated to dinner and given all kinds of clothing such as coats, sweaters and shoes, as well as food for the trip to the Home. Thus the children arrived in leather shoes in the middle of December when freezing temperatures grip that part of European Russia. The girl who died had already suffered from an ear condition in the sanatorium and as a consequence of it was partially deaf. She was one of the youngest children, a quiet unassuming girl. When she developed a high fever and was delirious all night, our physician's assistant decided to take her to the hospital in Koshki and Stefan drove them there. A very good military surgeon was on the staff of the hospital and the child was immediately operated on. The next day she died. The body was brought back to the Home, dressed in a white dress and placed on the floor in a hallway while Mr. Kozuch made a coffin. Father Oszmianski put a little icon into the dead girl's hands because she was of the Russian Orthodox faith. The children were afraid to go outside at night and the next day said that "little Irene visited their rooms at night."

The next morning Maks, Mr. Surgiel and Mr. Bazyluk used picks and shovels dig a grave in the village's German cemetery because the ground was frozen to the depth of one foot. Four adults carried the little coffin on their shoulders. They were followed by the children and then by the rest of the adults, as well as by the miller's family. At the grave site Father Oszmianski said a short prayer and everybody cried and whispered "Niech Ci ziemia lekka bedzie" (May you rest in peace) when the pieces of frozen earth were shoveled on the little coffin. A white birch cross was placed on the grave along with a wreath made of pine branches from the Christmas Tree with a white ribbon woven into it on the cross. On the ribbon the children wrote with an indelible pencil "To Irene from the girls and the boys." When we left the cemetery I looked back at the first Polish grave in Sergeyevka. That evening Mendelek spoke to me while looking pensively into the darkness through an iced up window. He said: "It is terrible. We will return and our parents will be waiting for us, but Irene will not return even though her parents will be waiting for her. They will not be even able to visit her grave." The boy was right, but he did not foresee that his and Gusta's parents would not be waiting for them and that the two of them would not be able to visit their parents' graves because they were Jewish and their parents would perish with 3,000,000 other Polish Jews.

In a few days little Irene was almost forgotten. Life had to go on and the New Year of 1943 was approaching rapidly. We, i.e. Steve and Michael in addition to our family (without Kathy, of course), were invited to the millers' for New Year's Eve. Nina also invited Roza Kalman. The two girls had become friendly since Roza was appointed the secretary of the local Communist Youth League cell and Nina was

still worried about consequences of her "desertion" from the plant in Chapayevsk. We brought some smoked fish, vodka and beer for Aunt Masha, who simply loved it. She prepared appetizers consisting of bacon cut up in small cubes, pickles, pickled green tomatoes, mushrooms and melon, butter and cottage cheese. The main dish was kurnik, an open-faced chicken pie. For dessert we had tea with honey which was served in cups that had been given to Aunt Masha from the Home's supplies, vatrushki with cheese, special Russian pastries, and pumpkin pie. After supper Uncle Peter, the miller, played the accordion, and we danced with the girls while trying to avoid bumping into the bed, the table and the trunk. Michael got pretty high, grabbed Nina's guitar and sang Ukrainian songs loudly. I watched Roza, because it was the first time that I gotten a close look at her. She was a pretty brunette although quite conceited and I was not surprised that Stefan fell for her and vice versa. After all, Stefan was quite the guy! "A man for all seasons" so to speak.

We stayed at the millers' until 10 o'clock that evening, and then returned home falling down in the snow on the way and went right to sleep when we got home. It did not take long for us to fall asleep. Then suddenly we were awakened by a terrible noise emanating from behind the doors to our kitchen and from the girls' hall next to our room. At first we did not know what had happened. Behind the doors people were banging on metal wash basins and buckets, whistling and yelling. My uncle pulled on a pair of pants over his pyjamas and stepped into the hallway. It was midnight on our clock and the residents of the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans in Sergeyevka were welcoming in the New Year 1943, and hoping that it would bring with it an end to the war and their safe return to Poland. However, their hopes were dashed by the events of the first quarter of that fateful year, a year of humiliation and reprisals directed against Poles in the Soviet Union.

As soon as my uncle stepped out, the invalids lifted him up and started tossing him in the air shouting "Long live our guardian!", "Long live Mr. Director!" and singing "Sto lat! Sto lat! Niech zyje, zyje nam!" (the Polish equivalent of "For he is a jolly good fellow!"). My little cousin, not understanding the reason for all that commotion and noise, started crying. The invalids asked for Michael and me to come out in order for them wish us a Happy New Year, but we were afraid of being tossed into the air and locked the doors leaving my uncle in the hallway. A portion of the residents, still banging on their "musical instruments," ran into the kitchen and woke up pani Hania, the cook, but she was too heavy to toss into the air. Nevertheless, they managed to toss her once and then being unable to catch her, dropped her on her bed which broke under pani Hania's weight. Then they got a hold of Steve, the household manager, and tossed him up not realizing that the ceiling in the kitchen was lower than the other ceilings. Consequently, Steve banged his head and actually blacked out. When he came to on the hands of the frolicking invalids ready to toss him up for the second time, he started swearing so violently that the men ran away covering up their ears. After this noisy welcome of the New Year, which lasted a whole hour, everybody went to sleep.

New Year's Day started with a holiday breakfast. Afterwards each smoker received half a package of tobacco and each child 50 grams (almost 2 ounces) of chocolate. At noon my uncle was called to the phone located in the village mayor's office. He returned shortly and ordered that the horse be hitched to a sled and sent to the Pogruznaya station, because someone had arrived from the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy. Anticipating an inspection, the invalids sprang into action despite the holiday. They started cleaning, washing the floors and putting their rooms in order. Michael went to the station and took Mendelek with him, because he did not know how to handle a horse. This time we made certain that the boy would not freeze and dressed him in a sheepskin coat, which was much too big for him. When they returned a few hours later, they brought an Embassy staffer and his wife, their small son and their luggage with them. He brought his family to leave it in our village under my uncle's and Michael's care because the NKVD had not extended their permit to stay in Kuibyshev even though they lived in the Embassy building. We accomodated the Milewicz family in our living quarters until next day when we were able to find a room for Mrs. Milewicz and the boy through the good graces of the village mayor and the chairman of the collective farm. Although Mr. Milewicz's visit was private and not in the line of duty, my uncle and Michael persuaded him to speak to the assembled invalids the next day after becoming acquainted with the conditions in the Home and after listening to both the staff and the residents. After supper and until late into the night the four of us shared our Soviet experiences.

Until the outbreak of the war in September 1939, Mr. Milewicz, who hailed from Poznan, had

worked in the Ministry of the Treasury in Warsaw. His wife, pani Bronka, was the daughter of a well-known Polish activist in those territories which after the partition of Poland at the end of the 18th century were given to the former German Empire. Their son, Milosz, was a very bright, intelligent and well-read boy about the same age as my cousin, Kathy. He was somewhat strange and spoiled probably because of being pampered by his parents after a tragic accident back in 1939. In the first days of September of 1939 the Milewicz family was evacuated together with the Ministry of the Treasury to the eastern part of Poland and finally landed in Lwow, which by that time was already occupied by the Red Army. In October of 1939 when there wasn't as yet a permanent border between the parts of Poland occupied by the Soviet Union and those occupied by Germany, the Milewicz family and several of their friends and their families decided to return to Warsaw. They rented a bus for several thousand rubles and traveled toward Warsaw. On the way the bus caught fire. The passengers stormed the emergency exit in the rear of the bus. Milosz and another passenger who were sitting near the driver sustained the worst burns. Both of the boy's hands and one temple were badly burned. The other passenger had burns on palms of both hands. The burn victims were taken to a hospital in Lwow and the return to Warsaw was nixed.

When the authorities began exiling Poles to the interior of the Soviet Union in June 1940, the Milewicz family shared the fate of hundreds of thousands of others and found themselves in a labor camp 11 km (7 miles) distant from ours. There they learned about our family from the people traveling between the settlements. After the amnesty in 1941, they moved to another settlement from which Mr. Milewicz was called to the Polish Embassy and given a job there thanks to the intercession of some of his friends. Several months later pani Bronka and Milosz received permission to join him in Kuibyshev and all three of them lived in the Embassy until the NKVD refused to extend the permission for pani Bronka and Milosz to remain in Kuibyshev. Mr. Milewicz decided that his family would be the best off in Sergeyevka because of the Home for Polish Invalids and because of my uncle who was highly regarded and respected at the Embassy.

The next morning my uncle and Michael took Mr. Milewicz to the mayor. Anna Pavlovna was in conference in her office with the collective farm's chairman. As soon as she noticed the visitors through the half-open doors, she invited them inside and together with Stepan Sergeyevich very graciously welcomed Mr. Milewicz. In the beginning the conversation centered on general topics like the weather, the trip from Kuibyshev, etc. Finally my uncle explained the reason for their visit, namely to find lodging for pani Bronka and her son in our village because she was to be a teacher and a tutor for the children. Mr. Milewicz added that in February 1943 the children would be transferred to India, and his wife and son would be leaving with them. Anna Pavlovna promised to look around for some suitable lodgings and let us know that evening. Both she and Stepan Sergeyevich were very flustered and behaved as if Mr. Milewicz was the Polish Ambassador.

By the time my uncle, Mr. Milewicz and Michael returned from the village mayor's office, the invalids and the children had gathered in one of the bigger rooms and sat wherever space could be found. My uncle introduced Mr. Milewicz as the speaker. When the applause died down, Mr. Milewicz briefly expressed his approval for what had been done to provide shelter and subsistence for the Polish invalids and children. He emphasized his admiration for my uncle's efforts on behalf of the Home. "The Embassy" he stated, "is extremely pleased with your work and has absolutely no plans to interfere with your activities. You have carte blanche despite the letters sent to the Embassy with complaints about the management and the general situation in the Home. It is hard to believe that some of these invalids who have found shelter thanks to your untiring efforts and organizational ability sent such letters. The Embassy of the Polish Republic expresses to you its deepest gratitude for your past and present efforts directed toward improving the lot of the Polish population in the Soviet Union." The invalids felt guilty and avoided looking at my uncle and at Michael. Those who had been satisfied with their stay at the Home threw epithets like "ungrateful pigs," etc. in the direction of the "complainers."

When Mr. Milewicz finished his remarks, individual invalids took the floor. They complained about the food not being to their liking, about the limits placed on their wanderings within our village or on going to other villages and about being asked to do some of the chores around the Home. My uncle explained that the kitchen received 50% more food supplies than was allowed by government standards. The residents had elected a representative who received the food supplies from the larder and supervised the preparation of meals so there was no possibility of stealing. Furthermore, a new calendar quarter had just

The room for Pani Bronka was in the two-room cabin of the former village mayor who had been drafted in the spring of 1942. His wife agreed to rent the end room, while she and her five children aged 4 to 14 years lived in the room Pani Bronka would have to cross in order to reach her room. That evening the village mayor, Mr. and Mrs. Milewicz and my uncle went to look at the room. It was a nice size and quite decently furnished with furniture "appropriated" from German homes. The landlady, Grusha, made a very good impression and my uncle managed to find a moment to whisper to her that she was not giving up the room for free and that Pani Bronka would discuss this matter with her. Grusha, on the other hand was very pleased that she would have a "better class of people" staying with her.

The next morning Henryk drove Mr. Milewicz to the Pogruznaya railroad station. In the afternoon pani Bronka and Milosz moved into their new quarters and got settled. Of course, they received their food supplies from the Home's storehouse. Pani Bronka was embarrassed about this arrangement but both my uncle and Michael explained to her that since she would be in charge of the smaller children she was getting provisions as a staff member and not as the wife of an Embassy employee. It was appropriate and necessary for someone to be in charge of the children. Stefan devoted a lot of his time to the boys in addition to being the assistant household manager. The boys were very difficult to manage. Actually in terms of their life experiences they were more like grown-up men than 14 or 15 year old boys. They knew more about real life than many 20-year old adults had known before the war. Smoking cigarettes was an addiction with them, rather than an attempt to impress others. No appeals, threats or explanations by the adults about the detrimental effects of cigarette smoke on people's lungs made any impression on them. "We will try to kick the habit," Mendelek used to say, "but gradually. We are too addicted to cigarette smoking to stop suddenly." So as not to upset the adults, the boys smoked in the corners of rooms or in the latrine.

The girls were more obedient and easier to manage but there was no special person in charge of them. The timing of Pani Bronka's arrival was fortuitous. Although Pani Maria, the assistant manageress, slept in the same room as the girls, her presence had a detrimental rather than a positive effect on their upbringing. In the evening when the girls were lying on their straw mattresses on the floor, Pani Maria told them "true stories" about a girl who had been raped by her fiance and then abandoned when she gave birth to a baby. The girl's parents also renounced their daughter and she was forced to fend for herself and the baby, and both were frequently starving. As a result of those "instructive evening chats" the girls could not fall asleep and were afraid to go out and relieve themselves at night. When my uncle found out about it, he called in Pani Maria and categorically prohibited her from any further "upbringing" of the girls.

A few days later Pani Bronka started teaching classes to the younger children who, although they listened quietly and attentively, were rather unhappy that they were learning to read and write in Polish. They missed the Russian instruction and the stories about the 1917 October Revolution, about Lenin and Stalin, etc. The Polish Government-in-Exile, Gen. Sikorski, its head and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, the Polish brigades which covered themselves with glory at Narvik in Norway and Tobruk in North Africa, the Polish fliers who participated in the Battle of Britain and other activities of the RAF, the Polish warships which escorted merchant transports to Murmansk with supplies for the Soviets, all meant nothing to the children. Their heroes were the Red Army and its leaders: the mustached Marshal Budienny and the "Iron Marshal" Woroshilov. The boys had once remarked to Stefan and to me that "it was Budienny who lead the Soviet First Mounted Cavalry and chased the 'White Poles' to the gates of Warsaw. If it were not for the 'fascist Trotski's' treachery, all of Europe would have been communist." We did not enter into political discussions with the boys, because we were afraid that they would report to the NKVD our questioning the knowledge they had gained from the "Short Course of the History of GCP (b)" (Great Communist Party of the Bolsheviks) to. Such a report meant nothing short of sedicious activity. So we left the boys to themselves hoping that they would change their beliefs and opinions under the influence of a shocking event which would do the trick almost in the blink of eye. Sometimes the boys attended Pani Bronka's classes, borrowed Polish books from my cousin Kathy and read the Polish newspapers and pamphlets Mr. Milewicz brought with him.

The Embassy sent new invalids all the time. One day the Duron family, which consisted of a father, mother, two daughters, Kate and Stefa, and a son, Gene, showed up at the Home. Actually only the father qualified as an invalid, because in World War I he had been shot through the wrist and had two missing ribs. He claimed that "the entire 'Ambassadoria,' Col. Rudnicki, the Military Attache, and even

Ambassador Romer had ordered the whole family to be admitted to the Home." Papa Duron told stories about how they had been shipped to Siberia somewhere in the vicinity of Tobolsk and how they had walked on foot from there to Kuibyshev. Since his tales were reminiscent of those written by Baron Munchhausen, we did not pay much attention to them and my uncle was against accepting all five Durons into the Home despite the fact that the whole family was "photographed with the Polish Ambassador and other dignitaries."

One day a cable arrived from the Embassy asking that special care be given to an invalid whose name was distorted (at that time a frequent occurrence in Russian telegrams), but seemed similar to "Duron." Consequently, my uncle went to Koshki and phoned the Embassy in order to clarify the situation of the Duron family. The Embassy said to accept only the father as an invalid and eventually one of daughters for some work if there was a need, but the rest of the family was to live in the village. The cable concerned another invalid who was to show up any day in Sergeyevka. That evening my uncle returned with Michael, who did not care for "Papa" Duron either, and communicated to him the Embassy's decision about accepting him alone as an invalid and one of the daughters as a helper in the kitchen in exchange for meals. Mr. Duron threw a tantrum and threatened to report my uncle to the "Ambassadoria," to Col. Rudnicki, to Ambassador Romer and to the NKVD (not necessarily in that order). Finally Mrs. Duron mitigated the situation by apologizing for her husband's rudeness and asking my uncle for some assistance for the rest of the family because there was very little to do on a collective farm during the winter. My uncle promised to supply the rest of the Duron family with food from the Home's kitchen with the exception of bread.

The next day pan Marcelli, the invalid announced in the cable, arrived. He was so dirty, unshaven and so full of lice that he could not be permitted into the rooms. Maks, who shared the barbering duties with Henryk, shaved the new resident and cut his hair in the hallway. Since it happened to be a wash day, pan Marcelli washed up in the laundry room. His clothing was carried on long sticks into the wood shed so that the lice could be "frozen out." Since there were no spare trousers in the warehouse, the new resident received a woolen undershirt, sweater, underpants and a blanket. In this get-up he paraded throughout the Home and walked to the dining hall. Pan Marcelli hailed from Lodz, where he had been a wealthy manufacturer before the war. He was unmarried and only 45 years old. He looked more like 65, because his hair was completely white. In Lodz pan Marcelli had left a mother and a spinster sister. From the moment he arrived at the Home, he got the nickname "Garbage Dump." The man ate anything to satisfy his chronic hunger. He did not disdain raw potatoes, beets, or smoked fish heads from the fish he shared with one of the mentally sick invalids.

That same week four more children arrived from Ulyanovsk. As soon as Mendelek and the other boys got settled in the Home, they had written to their friends in Ulyanovsk who, in turn, wrote to my uncle imploring him to get them out of the factory. My uncle explained to Mendelek that the only solution for those boys was to escape, but that Mendelek had to make the idea sound like his advice and not the director's. Mendelek did write and that week in January two boys and two girls showed up at the Home. Actually it was difficult to consider them children. Both boys said they were fifteen but one of them obviously had to shave, and the girls were close to 16 years of age and physically well-developed young women. It is difficult to imagine the joy of those four and the rest of the children. Tears were flowing freely especially because one of the two boys found a younger sister among the girls who had come from the sanatorium. She just would not let him out of her sight.

The two girls, Genia and Hela, were ringleaders in the girls' room and helped pani Bronka. They were not infected with Bolshevik propaganda and were only too happy to be in a Polish orphanage. There was no particular leader among the boys. All of them very much respected Mendelek's opinion although he was the smallest of them. Of the two brothers who had arrived from Bezimyanka before Mendelek, the older, Wlodek, was my favorite and through him I tried to exert my influence on the boys to restrain some of their excesses. The younger, Bronek, was my aunt's favorite. Stefan's favorite was clever and shrewed Wilek, an ardent communist and sworn enemy of prayers. Several days after the arrival of the "Ulyanovsk Four" another boy, Adam, showed up at the Home. He was undoubtedly older than sixteen, the age which separated the children from the adults in the Soviet Union at that time. Adam said that he had been a sailor on the Volga and then worked in a factory, but the truth of the matter was that his mother lived in Yelkhovka, at the region's center approximately 45 km (28 miles) distant from Sergeyevka. My uncle

accepted him into the orphanage but warned him in the beginning: "Adam, from now on you are again a child. You have to stop smoking cigarettes and talking in a low voice."

The end of January was almost upon us. The children had adjusted to the living conditions and the routine of the Home. Every Sunday evening there was dancing to the music of Stefan's accordion. Pani Hanka's, admirer used to spell Stefan on the instrument. Those evenings were popular not only with the invalids who could dance but also with the children. Nina from the mill, Roza Kalman, Tosya, the postmistress, and the Polish youth from the village always attended. The children also spent the weekday afternoons dancing, so there was no reason for them to feel sad, however, their education left much to be desired because pani Bronka had no pedagogical know-how whatsoever. My uncle shared his observations in that area with Michael, the Embassy's Trustee for the Koshki district, who suggested that the Embassy send the woman who had originally recommended Michael for work at the Embassy. She used to be a trained teacher and a Girl Scout leader in Poland. The next day Michael phoned the Embassy, related the situation and was assured that the Social Welfare Department would send the requested person.

In the meantime Michael started making inspection trips throughout the district taking pani Bronka with him. First they were picked up in Koshki by a wagon from Petrovka and they went and "inspected" that settlement. When they returned to Koshki, a wagon sent from "Engels Collective Farm" by Father Wladyslaw, a young Polish priest, was waiting for them. Following that "inspection" they returned to the Home and announced that on the next Sunday Father Wladyslaw would arrive with a group of youngsters from "Engels" to put on an amateur performance. My uncle expressed his surprise that neither pani Bronka nor Michael had consulted him, as the Home's director, prior to inviting the group. Furthermore, he felt that the Soviet authorities might be opposed to having Poles wandering throughout the district and, therefore, might regard it as a form of sedition which would have dire consequences for the Home.

After Michael went back to Koshki, my uncle, my aunt and I discussed this rather strange situation and, since pani Bronka had started "sticking her nose" into the operations of the Home, we began to suspect that maybe she had been sent by the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy to investigate the situation of the Polish population in the district and in the Home, as well as the relationships between the residents and the administration of the Home. We also suspected that Michael was notified by the Embassy to initiate the "inspection trips" with Pani Bronka. In order to clarify this whole situation, my uncle phoned the Embassy one day when he had some business to attend to in Koshki. He spoke with Mr. Milewicz first because he did not want to bring the whole matter to the attention of the Social Welfare Department's head. Mr. Milewicz was surprised about his wife's activities. He asked my uncle to use his position as the Home's director to point out to Pani Bronka the inappropriateness of her behavior. As far as inviting Father Wladyslaw's performers, the Department of Social Welfare would send a letter admonishing Michael as the Embassy's Trustee.

Upon his return from Koshki, my uncle had a talk with pani Bronka. She admitted that her behavior had been totally inappropriate but said that the "inspection trips" had been arranged by Michael and that he was completely unsuited for the position of the Embassy's Trustee. Pani Bronka finished her talk with my uncle by saying: "If you do not do something to remove Michael from his position, then I will phone the head of the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy and have this half-wit transferred from here!" My uncle managed to calm Pani Bronka who had become hysterical by now but he had no idea whatsoever about the reason for her rage until a few days later when the Sznycer brothers, Saul and Isaac, came from Petrovka. They were quite upset and when they found themselves alone with my uncle, they reported that during the "inspection trip" by Michael and pani Bronka, she had stayed with the Sznycer family, while Michael had organized a meeting of the Poles in one of the collective farm's brigades. During the meeting he tried to agitate them against my uncle as the Director of the Home for Polish Invalids. He suggested that they write letters urging the Embassy to fire my uncle and have him replaced by Father Wladyslaw. Furthermore, he also agitated against the Sznycers, who "as delegates from Petrovka had been stealing clothing, food products, etc." My uncle ignored the whole affair and told the two brothers: "Gentlemen! I do not wish to get involved in your matters or in any of the rivalries of dealing with your representing the Poles of Petrovka. As far as the Trustee is concerned, my impression is that your informer has no understanding of the situation." Since pani Bronka had been present at the Sznycers' when someone reported to them about the meeting, her rage during her conversation with my uncle now

became clear to him.

After the dinner which was washed down with ample quantities of vodka, brought by the Sznycers, and after having been calmed down by my uncle and by the vodka, they left for Petrovka. A few days later pani Bronka received a letter from her husband in which Mr. Milewicz categorically forbade her to mix in the affairs of Polish population (she showed that part of his letter to my uncle). Michael received a letter signed by the head of Embassy's Social Welfare Department in which he was told in no uncertain terms to keep Father Wladyslaw away from the women and children because his influence on them was highly undesirable. Michael could not comprehend it at all ("What do they have against that poor innocent cleric?") especially since he favored the priest and planned to push my uncle out and have Father Wladyslaw take over the stewardship of the Home. My uncle received a cable requesting him to come to the Embassy immediately in order to receive a shipment of clothing and food for the districts and for the Home. The message conveyed a sense of urgency; however, it would take a minimum of ten days to get an official travel pass, because the district NKVD had to check with the Kuibyshev NKVD about the reasons and the length of time my uncle was to be gone. Therefore, it was necessary to find some other means of getting to the city. In the summer time there would not have been any problem; just a few hours travel by truck. In the winter, however, trucks were only sometimes available from Yelkhovka, 45 km (28 miles) distant from our village, or one could travel by train from the Surgut railroad station 70 km (44 miles) distant from Sergeyeвка and 100 km (almost 65 miles) from Kuibyshev. The only way to reach either Yelkhovka or Surgut was by sled, and our Mishka II would never make that trip. We thrashed the subject of my uncle's getting to the Embassy until late at night and came up with no plausible solution. The next day, however, brought a "savior."

It was noontime when a small sled drawn by a handsome black stallion pulled in front of our building and after a moment a giant man over 6 feet tall and wearing a black tulup (a loose shipskin coat with a high standing collar) entered the room. A tulup was used for winter travel by sled because it protected the traveler not only from the cold but also from the blowing snow. My aunt almost passed out when the stranger asked for my uncle. Judging from his looks, his horse and his sled, she suspected an NKVD officer. My uncle was in one of the halls, and I went to fetch him with a frightened expression on my face. A warm exchange of greetings between the stranger and my uncle quickly dispelled our concerns. In the beginning, the conversation was rather general but my uncle gave an "eye signal" for my aunt and for me to disappear.

After a half-hour the Russian left, a pleased expression on his face. A half-finished bottle of vodka, two glasses and some pickles remained on the table. My uncle was beaming, because quite by chance the problem of his getting to Kuibyshev was solved. The visitor turned out to be the representative of the Council of People's Commissars for our district and thanks to his intervention we had been able to purchase the horse, hay and oats for the Home. Now he came to ask my uncle a favor. His mistress, the director of the District Health Department, had become pregnant and needed quinine to terminate her pregnancy. Since it was well known throughout the district that the Home for Polish Invalids had all kinds of drugs, vitamins and even rice, which was sold in Soviet pharmacies in gram quantities and by prescription only, he came to ask for some quinine. It so happened that we did not have that particular drug. My uncle told the Russian that he would bring quinine from the Embassy but that he had no way of getting there. At this point the Russian offered his help. The next Sunday he would be traveling by sled to Surgut and from there to Kuibyshev, and would gladly take my uncle with him. It was decided the two of them would meet in Koshki on Saturday. A few days remained for my uncle to get ready for the trip when two momentous events took place.

First of all, the whole Polish colony and even the Russians, as well as the Chuvashes, were excited about the arrival of Izrael's, Roza's and David's father. Their mother had died while all of them were in the nearby hospital sick with typhus and the three youngsters had been alone ever since. With the help of the Missing Persons Bureau of the Embassy which my uncle had supplied with detailed information about the three orphans, their father was found in the Chkalov province and immediately came to join his children. One could hardly imagine the happiness of the father and the children being together again after a two-year separation. Mr. Goldberg, a tailor by trade, was very well off in the Chkalov province. He brought with him not only clothing for all of his children but also money, furs and even kitchen utensils. Like all tailors and shoemakers in the Soviet Union he had plenty of work. Moreover, he emphasized proudly that

he was a "Warsaw tailor" (to be sure from Wolynska Street; only our family who were very familiar with prewar Warsaw knew that he was just a plain patcher). The next day Roza brought her father to us. Behind the two of them came little David, who did not want to let his newly found father out of his sight lest he lose him again. Mr. Goldberg introduced himself and thanked us for the special consideration we had given his children during the distributions of clothing and food. He was a very nice, quiet and obviously shrewd individual. His Polish was atrocious and at times funny, full of the true "flavor" of Warsaw's Wolynska Street.

The other important development was the arrival of Pani Helena, the long awaited teacher sent by the Embassy at Michael's request. She did not arrive alone but was accompanied by another Helena, a 63-year old senile woman whom the teacher had taken under her wing while in the prison camp. The teacher made a positive impression. She was dressed in a khaki dress, which resembled a Girl Scout's uniform and was sewn out of two British army shirts. Over her heart a Polish eagle was pinned to the dress. Since both women arrived at dusk, they stayed with us for supper. We discussed various subjects pertaining to the children, their education and upbringing. Pani Helena also told us her story. She was arrested in 1940 as a Polish teacher and shipped off to the interior of the Soviet Union. Her husband and son remained in a little town in the Bialowieza Forest. The second pani Helena owned a small estate in the Vilno province and belonged to the Polish gentry. These two "sins" were sufficient to send a 63-year old woman to a prison camp in northern Russia. The two women had immense appetites and that evening when we were already in bed, Michael remarked that the food reserves of the Home may be seriously endangered. Both women temporarily shared one bed in the girls' hall. The new teacher announced cheerily that another teacher and another acquaintance, to serve as the household manager, would be arriving soon. My uncle was surprised but ignored the "news," because he could clear the matter up at the Embassy. Only Michael, already in his bed, started mumbling about "those crazy women who bring their cronies."

The next morning at breakfast Pani Helena expressed her opinion about the children: "Ungrateful black souls! They do not want to pray, but this is a Polish Orphanage; they will have to pray or they will get no food!" My uncle informed the new teacher that it was a Polish Orphanage but not a Catholic one and that the Embassy does not wish to force the children to pray. He finished by saying: "As long as I am in charge here I will not permit the children to starve in order to force them to pray. You have an old-fashioned approach to child rearing. One can achieve more with kindness than with force." Pani Bronka, who was present at that exchange, wholeheartedly supported my uncle's position. Neither she nor Milosz ever prayed and at one time she had said to us: "Both my husband and I are atheists and we are bringing up Milosz in that spirit." Michael did not take a definite stand on this issue. On the one hand, as the representative of the Embassy in the field, he could not go against its rules, on the other hand, however, he did not want to hurt Pani Helena, whose intervention had gotten him a job at the Embassy and, subsequently, the position he presently held.

One more problem had to be solved in connection with my uncle's trip to Kuibyshev, namely a helper for the trip was needed because of the possibility that a railroad freight car would have to be leased to accommodate the clothing and food supplies, which meant a two-week journey on account of military transports moving toward the front. My uncle did not want to take any chances and have the goods unescorted, because even sealed freight cars were burglarized. The helper would have to reach the Embassy on his own and then return with my uncle. Stefan wanted to participate in this adventure but was afraid that the NKVD was still looking for him. In the village he was not registered, because the Koshki NKVD had prohibited Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, to register any Poles except the invalids and orphans. Finally Maks offered his assistance which my uncle eagerly accepted. So on Saturday Maks left by train from the Pogruznaya station, while my uncle went to Koshki in order to meet the representative of the Council of People's Commissars and travel with him to Surgut.

The next day, Sunday, a group of Poles headed by Father Wladyslaw, arrived from the "Engels Collective Farm." All were youngsters and, after a brief rest during which they became acquainted with our children, they started getting ready for the performance. Our boys placed benches in the girls hall and made a curtain out of blankets. The audience consisted of all of residents of the Home, Polish youngsters from the village, Nina, Roza Kalman, the postmistress, a new letter carrier, Nadia and another teacher. The one-act play which was written by a woman in "Engels" was about the adventures of the "forest

people," Polish partisans. In the last scene of the play an allegory of Poland, portrayed as a girl in chains, entered the stage, then the partisans ripped off the chains and she blessed them. The performance shocked the audience. Women cried while men loudly expressed their admiration. Even the Russian visitors liked the play very much, although they did not understand a word. The performance ended with the recitation of several poems by Slonimski from a booklet titled "Alarm" which had been published in London. After the show the performers joined our invalids and children for supper. Stefan and Michael went to see Anna Pavlovna to get her permission for the guests to stay overnight, while Father Wladyslaw came to our room, and we talked about various things.

Father Wladyslaw was a tall man about 30 years old with rosy cheeks, a head full of hair and a British-style mustache. He wore a quilted jacket and quilted trousers stuck inside riding boots. His looks, manner of talking and overall demeanor were not like those of a priest. Father Wladyslaw resembled an officer of the uhlans more than a clergyman. I recalled Mr. Milewicz once had mentioned that the people in the Embassy did not have a favorable opinion of the man. They thought he was not a priest at all but possibly a seminarian. They also had information that while he was imprisoned Wladyslaw acted as a provocateur and informed on Polish fellow prisoners to the prison authorities, but this story had never been confirmed. However, the Embassy never attempted to get permission for him to leave the Soviet Union although the Embassy had made those kinds of requests for other priests. Furthermore, a representative of the Polish church hierarchy who had come from London for a visitation acted coolly toward Wladyslaw. On the other hand, Michael claimed that Wladyslaw was a priest and even a classmate of one of his brothers. Be that as it may, the priest's behavior in the months to come convinced us that the Embassy's suspicions were unjust, but even if they had been partially true Wladyslaw totally vindicated himself during the subsequent events.

As we talked, Michael and Stefan returned from Anna Pavlovna with her permission for the "actors" to spend that night in Sergeevka and with the news that Motya, a peasant woman who lived in a two-room cabin, would let them sleep in one of the rooms which she did not occupy during the winter. So our "guests" spread out straw on the floor of the empty room and went to sleep. We asked the priest to have supper with us and, needless to say, it was washed down with quite a bit of vodka.

After supper Father Wladyslaw went to talk with the invalids and, as a clergyman, to influence their behavior. As it turned out he had no influence whatsoever. None of the old women or other believers showed him the respect due a priest. "He is like a dragon!" one old woman said. That remark was based not only on his demeanor but also on his pronouncements. The new teacher, pani Helena, complained to the priest that the boys were running away from evening and morning prayers. Making certain that the guilty ones could hear him, he said: "They should not be forced to pray. Faith cannot be forced upon anyone and no one should be refused meals as a form of punishment." Pani Helena and the old women were shocked by his answer, but the boys immediately became infatuated with Wladyslaw. Before the girls' bedtime Pani Helena asked the priest to lead them in the evening prayers. One could not even imagine everybody's surprise when the boys en masse marched into the girls' hall and then prayed with such zeal that it was as if they all wanted all of their sins to be forgiven with that evening's prayers. (But the next day again nobody showed up for prayers!)

The second encounter that evening took place between Father Wladyslaw and batyushka Oszmianski. The two of them engaged in a religious discussion about the Old Testament during which Father Wladyslaw said that religion should be updated in view of the scientific investigations pertaining to the origins of life, Darwin's theory, etc. batyushka's hair and beard almost stood on end, and he looked positively dumfounded. The next day at dawn the "actors" went back to their collective farm, and life in the Home went back to its normal if somewhat uncertain style.

The children got used to their new teacher. She organized the girls into groups similar to Girl Scout troops which took on various names. The groups competed among themselves in keeping the girls' hall in order, in studies, etc. However, the new teacher's activities were limited to working with girls. The boys kept to themselves, stayed close to the grown-ups and listened to their conversations and stories which were hardly educational. No amount persuasion by Stefan, myself or pani Helena did any good. The boys respected the new teacher but did not want "to be ruled by a woman."

The children were of various religious persuasions; however, the devout residents made it their goal to have the children say their prayers, and took the matter of religious education upon themselves. Consequently, every morning and every evening when it was time to say prayers, three different prayers were said in the three halls. In one of them Pani Helena led the Roman-Catholic children in prayer, in the second one Father Oszmianski's basso profundo drowned the voices of the Russian-Orthodox children and in the third hall Pani Rebeka taught Gusta, Mendelek and a few other Jewish children the Jewish prayers. "I know them," she told Father Oszmianski, "My Daddy was a rabbi, and he had a beard like yours." Oszmianski winced at having his beard compared to that of a rabbi because he was a rabid anti-Semite.

After several days my uncle sent a cable from Kuibyshev saying that the transport had been loaded onto a freight railroad car and both he and Maks would escort it to the Pogruznaya station. The residents became happy at the thought of clothing and provisions, and made all kinds of plans related to the expected shipment. Michael took care of running the Home in the absence of my uncle and frequently visited with the residents in their halls. When not occupied with matters pertaining to the Home, he frequented the home of the physician's assistant in the neighboring village. One day Bronek, one of the boys and my aunt's favorite, knocked on the door of our kitchen and asked for my aunt with an embarrassed expression on his face. She took him into the room because his confusion and embarrassment implied something important. "Madam! Pan Michael told the male invalids that it is high time to change the management of the Home. He said something else, but I could not hear it, because I was hiding with pan Stefan behind the door; but Wladek (his brother) hid under one of the beds and will know everything this evening." My aunt pretended to ignore the whole thing but was actually very upset.

After dinner Pani Helena came to our quarters to visit and we told her what had occurred in the men's hall and about the behavior of her favorite, Michael. The teacher turned green and uttered through clenched teeth: "Where is that punk? I will tell him what I think about him!" But the "punk" was nowhere to be found; he had gone to visit the physician's assistant. "I will give it to him! And also for that woman!" Pani Helena carried on. "It is a disgrace for the Embassy's Trustee to behave like that and to have the whole village gossip that he sleeps with the physician's assistant!" At that moment Stefan entered the room. We bombarded him with questions, because he had already had a report from Wladek who had eavesdropped from under the bed. It turned out that Michael had told the invalids to write to the Embassy and urge a change in the management of the institution. He told them: "The director is robbing you. You do not get enough to eat and they (our family) stuff themselves like pigs. I know because I see it all the time, but now I cannot permit it to continue. If you address a complaint to me, I will forward it to the Embassy. Not only do they stuff themselves, but they also feed Stefan, Henryk, Pani Maria and the new teacher who recently arrived and is bossing everybody around. In the warehouse there is plenty of clothing which they take for themselves while you are walking around barely clothed!" Michael was supported by Father Oszmianski and by the armless pan Kolanko. Stefan finished his story. Pani Helena looked as if she would get apoplexy at any moment. "I will give it to him! I will give it to him!" she repeated over and over again. "That's right!" Stefan remarked. "Because he refers to you as 'the old witch' or the 'old devotee'." That was already too much for the teacher and she stomped out of the room all upset. "Madam!" Stefan said to my aunt. "Don't get upset over it. We are your friends, and we see how hard your husband works for the benefit of those mean people."

Michael returned at dusk and announced that he was going to Koshki with the chairman of a neighboring collective farm. Pani Helena, who had calmed down after the day's events, happened to be in our room and tried to talk to Michael about the physician's assistant and the "talk of the village" regarding their affair. But the "Embassy's Trustee" reprimanded her: "Those are all lies and gossip. You should not believe any of the nonsense you hear!" When Michael left that evening he stayed away for a week and returned the day before my uncle's return from Kuibyshev. Bazyli and Henryk, who traveled to Koshki several times that week and stopped at Aunt Tosya's, reported that "Michael frequently drank vodka with the 'Petrovka boys and that the 'Russian whore' constantly visited him."

On February 12, 1943, my uncle sent a cable to Michael asking him to contact the "Petrovka Poles," the Poles in the "Engels Collective Farm" as well as those in our village so as to have enough people and wagons at the Pogruznaya station the next day in order to unload a 9,000 kg (10 tons) shipment and transport it to our village. The freight car had to be emptied in twelve hours, otherwise a

fee would be levied for the use of the railroad siding. It was also necessary to find a shed near the station for the temporary storage of the shipment until the wagons arrived. Michael phoned the "Engels" collective to notify Father Wladyslaw, sent a message with one of the Poles to Petrovka because there was no phone there, and came himself to Sergeyevka in order to organize a transport and unloading crew. The next morning Mishka II was hitched to a big wagon and Henryk, Bazyli, a few somewhat able-bodied invalids, the boys and Michael went to the station. Prior to leaving Michael established that the goods would be stored in the vacant room of the woman who had sheltered the "Engels artists" for one night because there was absolutely no storage space in the Home. Stefan and Steve, our household manager, were to live in the room for a few days and guard the goods which would soon be distributed among the invalids and the district's Poles.

On the day before my uncle's return rumors started circulating in the village that the Home for Polish Invalids was going to be inspected. The rumor went on to say that after the inspection a complete change of the managing personnel would take place as well as other radical changes, and that my uncle would be arrested because "the NKVD and the prosecutor are concerned about thievery and mismanagement" in the institution. Those rumors, which originated with the chairman of the collective farm, the village mayor and the school principal who had attended a Party meeting in Koshki, upset my aunt terribly. She asked Michael to immediately send my uncle back from the station and to supervise the unloading of the shipment himself. However, my uncle did not return until the evening of the next day. He could not return earlier, because no one from the other collectives had arrived the previous day and our people alone unloaded the freight car and transferred its contents to the shed by making several trips with the wagon pulled by Mishka II. A number of people had remained with my uncle and Maks to guard the goods at night. The next morning three wagons arrived from the other collective farms and by the evening of that day the entire 10-ton shipment was transferred to Sergeyevka. We were glad that the four of us were together again and after supper when we told my uncle that Michael was scheming against him and about the rumors circulating in the village, he just laughed it off and called my aunt an "oversensitive hysteric."

That evening when we were already in bed my uncle told us the news that he had heard at the Embassy. It was very serious and not good at all, and we talked until late into the night. The Embassy was well aware of Michael's behavior and activities. They had decided to remove him from his position and replace him as soon as another suitable person could be found. The invalids had continued to lodge complaints about my uncle and the other personnel of the Home with the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy. The complainers were Father Oszmianski, Messrs. Kolanko, Duron, Formalny and even some of the children who were egged on by the adults. Not only did the Embassy pay no attention to the complaints, but it also issued a letter for my uncle specifically stating that it approved of his work and asking him to continue managing the Home in the same way and with the same spirit. Furthermore, my uncle was warned that there were two NKVD informers in the Home. One was batyushka Oszmianski, who knew Polish fluently but purposely pretended not to know it, and the other informer was Mr. Kolanko, who after his imprisonment in 1939 passed himself off as a Russian and informed on his Polish cellmates to the prison authorities. Now we recalled that long time ago when the old friendly gardner, came twice to find finally the proper size shoes, he had warned us about those two invalids. My uncle decided to publicly unmask both informers during a general meeting that he called for the next day.

The news which was close to our hearts was information about another uncle, Aleksander, an internist and older brother of the one with us. As a reserve officer in the Polish Army he had participated in the September 1939 military campaign and had been taken prisoner by the Red Army. When we lived in the "Red Star Collective Farm," we had inquired about Uncle Aleksander by mail at the Headquarters of the Polish Army in Yangi Yul, in the southern part of the Soviet Union. The only answer we received was that he had not reported to the Army. Every time my uncle, the Home director, visited the Embassy, he attempted to find some trace of his brother but with no success. This time Judge Kasinski, with whom my uncle had become very friendly, showed him the official transcripts of talks between the representatives of the Polish Republic and those of the Soviet Union dealing with the several thousands Polish officers held in prisoner of war camps in Kozielsk, Ostashkow and Starobielsk. In those transcripts there was information about the talk between Gen. Sikorski and Stalin when the latter stated that "all prisoners of war had been released and will report to the Polish Army in due time." Several transcripts reported talks Gen. Anders had held with various Soviet officials during which he cited the names of high-ranking Polish

officers and personal friends known to be held prisoner by the Soviets who would have joined Polish Army units if they had been set free. Finally there were transcripts of the conferences between the Polish Ambassador Kot and the Deputy Commissar (Minister) for Foreign Affairs, Wyshinski. The Soviets always seemed to have a standard answer: "We freed everyone. We do not know what happened to them afterwards. Russia is just too big to search for several hundred Polish officers in it." Actually it was not "several hundred" but several thousand, and we still did not know what happened to them.

On February 15, 1943, a very stormy meeting of all of the invalids took place. The residents, egged on by both the two NKVD informers and a few ignorant invalids, presented numerous complaints which basically boiled down to accusing Henryk, Stefan, Pani Maria, the assistant household manager, the cook, the baker, and the teacher, Pani Helena, of stealing food and depriving the invalids of part of their food rations. My uncle was accused of supporting their excesses by not interfering. When the people finished their complaints, my uncle stated that he was well aware of what was happening in the Home. Then he read the letter that he had received from the Embassy expressing their total approval of the work that was being carried out by the director and the staff. He finished his talk by stating that the sources of all problems in the Home were two NKVD informers who were purposefully sowing discord among the residents. He continued: "Those two are Father Oszmianski, who pretends neither speak nor understand any Polish, and Mr. Kolanko, who betrayed his cellmates for an extra bowl of prison slop three years before in a Soviet prison. Furthermore, Michael was guilty, because he did nothing to stop the agitation while serving as the Acting Director during my uncle's absence. The hall became so quiet that one could almost hear a pin drop. Everyone looked at the two informers and, undoubtedly, each tried to recall a situation when he/she could have said something that would have branded him/her "an enemy of the people and of the working class." Finally, my uncle interrupted the deathly silence by saying: "It is not too late. Maybe we can learn from what has happened and salvage something." At that moment Father Oszmianski stood up, turned toward my uncle and spoke in perfect Polish causing everyone present to almost fall off their seats: "It is too late and you will regret what you have said." The meeting adjourned. The residents whispered among themselves about what had happened and shunned Oszmianski and Kolanko as if they were lepers.

After dinner we started checking and inventorying the shipment from the Embassy. Food supplies for the Home such as sugar, rice and two cases of chocolate bars were transferred to my warehouse. During the transporting 12 chocolate bars mysteriously disappeared. On top of the Russian stove in the kitchen we placed several huge boxes with Manishevitz's matzos. The remainder of the shipment was stored in "Michael's warehouse" as we called the room in Motya's cabin. At the Embassy my uncle had requested two separate bills of lading: one for the Home and one for the districts, so there could be no argument because that way the assignments of the various items was made by the Embassy. At this time I do not recall the exact contents of that shipment, but I do remember that there were 350 blankets (200 for the Home and the rest for the districts), 150 British military uniforms dyed dark-green (100 for the Home and 50 for the districts), approximately 200 sweaters, close to 100 pairs of shoes, a tremendous number of dresses of all sizes and 100 brand new tuxedos. There were also food stuffs such as large cans of Argentinian lard, condensed and powdered milk, a large case of chocolate bars, a large number of huge boxes with matzos, over 100 bars of toilet soap and just as many bars of laundry soap.

We inventoried the shipment until next afternoon; i.e. February 16th. Upon returning home I chanced on a very unpleasant conversation between my uncle and the invalid, Wacław. It had to do with the fact that the smoked fish, which was stored in a large wooden crate in the woodshed, was gradually disappearing. I had noticed it for some time, because the contents of the "fish crate" had decreased by more than the number of fish distributed to the invalids. I shared my observation with Stefan who had the keys to the shed and used to leave Wacław and the baker's blind husband there when the two of them sawed logs for firewood. Stefan, who felt that his honor was tarnished by the residents' accusations of thievery and gluttony, had decided to catch the thief and concluded that Wacław had been stealing the fish and giving it to the boys who in turn were selling it in the village. My uncle called in Wacław and told him point blank that he would have to leave the Home, because in addition to stealing he was also demoralizing the boys by making them co-conspirators. Wacław confessed and with tears in his eyes begged my uncle not to throw him out of the Home, because he would just perish since he was unable to work and would be without shelter in the middle of the winter. Since the culprit swore that it would never happen again and since it would have been inhuman to expel from the Home an invalid who had no

means of supporting himself at that time, my uncle let Wacław remain. The boys were also suitably reprimanded by my uncle and by Stefan. I also managed to give them "holy hell" and later found out that my remarks did not fall on deaf ears.

That evening the two women that Michael had requested through the Embassy arrived at the Home: a second teacher, Pani Krysia, and Pani Elzbieta, who was to become the household manager according to Michael's plans. A third woman, Pani Przywara, came with them totally on her own and without even a travel pass. Temporarily the three women were put up in Michael's "warehouse." That evening my aunt, Pani Bronka and I went to meet the new arrivals. Pani Helena, Stefan and Henryk were also in the room. A bottle of vodka, several smoked fish and some matzos were on the table. It was not difficult to guess that Stefan had supplied the fish ("Wacław stole so many that a few more won't make any difference," he remarked to me) and the matzos were "courtesy" of Pani Helena from the boxes designated for the districts. She was in seventh heaven because she had both of "her girls" (as she called the two women) with her. One had to admit that Pani Elzbieta as well as Pani Krysia were way beyond that age when they could be referred to as "girls." Pani Krysia was a 40-year old spinster, a rather plump woman with short legs resembling an upside down bottle. In order to look like a girl she wore her hair in two braids which, nevertheless, did not alter the reality. Pani Krysia hailed from around Kielce but had taught school for a number of years in the eastern part of Poland and for that reason was arrested, shipped to the interior of the Soviet Union and sentenced in absentia to 8 years in prison. Pani Elzbieta, the mother of two small children, was married to an owner of a small estate. She was arrested and exiled for belonging to a Polish underground organization. The third woman seemed totally colorless except for a large nose which resembled a duck's bill. We chatted until 10 o'clock in the evening. The women were to sleep in Michael's "warehouse" and the next day we were to distribute the goods among our invalids. The distribution never took place because in the following weeks several important events happened which not only directly affected the Polish population in the Soviet Union but also reverberated through other countries, both occupied and Unoccupied by the Germans, where ever there were concentrations of Poles. The most significant events took place in London.

The Gathering Storm

The next day, which was February 17, 1943, around 10 o'clock in the morning, Michael phoned from Koshki and told my uncle that the *Raispolkom* (District Executive Committee) wanted he and my uncle to come for a conference regarding an extremely important matter. My uncle had Mishka hitched to a sled and drove to Koshki, immediately. We had a feeling of foreboding and so arranged with my uncle that I would wait for his phone call that evening. Rumors again started circulating throughout the village about my uncle's arrest and about the forthcoming liquidation of the Home for Polish Invalids. My aunt was in tears and the staff and the invalids walked around in a daze. Only the two NKVD informers and their buddies were all smiles. That evening my uncle phoned to say that he was OK. He still had to attend to some business and, therefore, would return the next day. That night my aunt and I did not sleep at all and kept a vigil at the window from the early morning on waiting for the sled with my uncle to arrive. He came around noontime accompanied by Michael. The expression on his face betrayed nothing and the mere fact that he had not been arrested calmed us somewhat.

When Michael left the room and we were alone my uncle told us that the situation looked bad and somewhat mysterious. In the *Raispolkom* he and Michael were presented with a copy of a document stating that according to Decision No.... of People's Council of Commissars, dated January 16, 1943, all social welfare institutions within the purview of the Embassy of the Polish Republic were to be taken over by the Soviet Government. The document was signed by the Chairman of the Council. Furthermore, the *Raispolkom* informed Michael and my uncle that on February 19th a commission chaired by a representative from *Oblsobes* (the Provincial Department of Social Welfare) would arrive in Sergeyevka to take over the Home. My uncle accepted this information but stated categorically that he would not transfer anything to any commission without contacting his superiors, i.e. the Embassy of the Polish Republic in Kuibyshev. Then the two of them went straight from the *Raispolkom* to the post office. That day it was impossible to get through to Kuibyshev but the two switchboard operators, who knew both Michael and my uncle and remembered the toilet soap, stockings and lipstick that they had been given, took turns, trying to get through to Kuibyshev. They finally succeeded in connecting my uncle with the Embassy at 10 o'clock in the evening. The phone was answered by the Second Secretary, Counselor Frejd. When my uncle told him about the conference at the *Raispolkom* and the contents of the document, the counselor was very surprised and said it was the first case reported to the Embassy. However, he did suggest getting prepared to transfer the institution to Soviet authorities while the Embassy lodged an official protest to the *Narkomindel* (the Foreign Ministry) through diplomatic channels. Because the director of the Social Welfare Department was not at the Embassy, my uncle asked Counselor Frejd whether the balance in the Home's bank account could be transferred to that of the Trustee. The counselor agreed to let them do it. When my uncle tried to ask about some other details; such as what to do with the last shipment of clothing, music started on the line and despite my uncle's shouting, Counselor Frejd could not hear him. It was obvious that the line was being tapped. The next day my uncle again tried unsuccessfully to get through to the Embassy. Thus after transferring the Home's funds to Michael's bank account both returned to Sergeyevka. In view of the unusual situation and without the permission of the Embassy to distribute clothing and blankets among the invalids, these items remained in the warehouse. Michael also advised against a hasty distribution.

The commission which was to take over the assets of the Home for Invalids arrived from Koshki on February 19, 1943, and immediately set to work. It was headed by the representative of the *Oblsobes* (the Provincial Department of Social Welfare), an old woman, who was as flat as a board. The other members of the commission were the new director of the Home, a Ukrainian with a glass eye, the head of the Regional Department of Social Welfare, a young good looking Russian woman, the head of the Regional Health Department, a former midwife, and our village mayor, Anna Pavlovna. The latter felt out-of-place as a member of the commission and she invited "her husband" (whispers in the village!), Maria Alexandrovna, the school principal for moral support. The Polish side was represented by my uncle and Michael. A large scale was brought to the warehouse and all of the food was weighed, every gram dutifully recorded by the secretary of the commission, the bookkeeper of our collective farm, and by me as the storekeeper from the Polish side. We worked until late that evening and then moved to Anna Pavlovna's office where the bookkeeper and I drafted a document about transferring the Home to the Soviet authorities. The document had to be copied in longhand three times because there was no carbon paper and four copies were needed: one for the *Oblsobes*, one for the new director, one for the Embassy

and one for my uncle, as the former director.

While we were busy writing the document, the Soviet side brought up the shipment of clothing for the invalids and demanded that it be written into the document. My uncle had planned to give it to Michael for distribution to the Polish population in his districts, and Michael had agreed. However, now he backed the Soviet side; he felt the shipment belonged to the *Oblsobes*. So, my uncle could not say anything. What seemed strange during those negotiations was that the new director based his reasoning on the existence of a separate bill of lading for the goods assigned to the Home for Invalids which made these goods part of its assets. His reasoning was correct, but it took my uncle and I some time to figure out how the new director knew about the existence of the two separate bills of lading. After the documents were written and signed by the representatives of both sides, the new director told my uncle to vacate the premises occupied by our family the next day and that the village mayor would find us new quarters in the village. Temporarily I remained in charge of the warehouse but the new director took the keys to it and a seal was placed on the padlock. Late that evening we returned home very depressed and did not pay any attention to Michael's assurances that "everything would turn out OK." On the contrary; everything seemed to be going from bad to worse.

The next morning it was discovered that someone had broken the seal on the padlock. This was the way that one of the invalids or one of the boys protested the transfer of the Home for Polish Invalids and Orphans to the Soviet authorities. The new director was furious and announced publicly that the culprit when found would be sent to prison for antistate activity. It became obvious that true Bolshevik management was to be the order of the day! The Home for Polish Invalids was transformed into the Indom (an abbreviation of *Invalidskiy Dom*, "Home for Invalids" in Russian). Next the new director opened the pantry and supervised my giving out the food supplies for the day. Then he locked it, sealed the padlock and left Father Oszmianski and Mr. Kolanko as guards. If there were any residents who still had doubts about those two being NKVD informers their doubts were now dispelled. Afterwards the new director went from the Indom to Michael's warehouse. After a short time, Bazyli pulled up to the warehouse with a sled and transferred those goods which were designated for the Indom to a room in the village administration building. That room was also sealed.

In the meantime my uncle discussed the problem of new living quarters for our family with Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor. The situation did not look good. Finally pani Bronka talked her landlady, Grusha, into letting us stay in pani Bronka's room. Grusha readily agreed to it hoping to benefit from this arrangement because we had various things which my uncle had received at the Embassy at one time or another. On February 21, 1943, after dinner, we vacated our room at the Indom and moved into Grusha's. All of the invalids helped us with the move and were obviously embarrassed, because they thought that their complaints and letters had brought about this turn of events.

That evening after I issued the food supplies for the next day's breakfast in the presence of the director and after he had sealed the pantry, I was asked to step into his office, which was located in the room which only the previous day served as our family's living quarters. I went in and had to control my surprise. Behind a table sat the District Commandant of the Militia and a woman in a militia uniform who turned out to be the Head of the Passport Bureau of the Militia. I used to see her in our village where she used to live and was even courted by Henryk. She had been evacuated from the Ukraine and her name was Nina. When the commandant saw me he asked: "Have you transferred everything to the new management?" I answered in the affirmative and he continued: "From now on you will have nothing to do with the Indom. You, as well as members of your family, are prohibited from coming within a 200 meter (yard) radius of the building. If you do not obey, we will take care of you so that you will never see the light of the day again!" This prospect was hardly encouraging! I was glad that my encounter with the "master and authority" went relatively smoothly and I returned to our new quarters, and reported on the uniformed guests in the Indom. The reasons for their visit puzzled us but we did not have to wait long for an explanation.

We worked out the sleeping logistics by having Kathy and my aunt occupy Milosz's bed, Milosz slept with his mother in her bed, while my uncle, Steve and myself stretched out on the floor. Steve moved in with us because he vacated his floor space in Michael's storeroom for pani Helena and her "girls." We were just getting settled for the night when someone nervously knocked on the window.

Grusha immediately opened the entry door and Stefan ran into our room. We lit the kerosene lamp. Stefan was out of breath, his face was as white as a sheet and his lower jaw quivered nervously. "They are giving passports to the residents," he whispered with an effort. "They are giving Soviet passports!" he repeated. Our reaction was a deathly silence. We were in shock. My aunt started asking nervously: "What will happen now? What will happen now?" The children, Milosz and Kathy, started crying. Finally my uncle said: "Calm down. Stefan! Tell us what is going on in there!"

By that time Stefan had calmed down somewhat and said: "You knew about the arrival of the militia commandant and the head of the Passport Office from Koshki. Well, when the invalids were getting ready for sleep and some had already laid down, the new director came into the women's room, called the names of the two oldest women and took them to his office. I was in the girls' room and eavesdropped at the door. The commandant told the two old women to hand in Soviet certificates that they had received in the camps or the temporary passports issued by the Polish Embassy in the summer of 1942 and to accept Soviet passports. Both categorically refused and none of the threats made by the the commandant could change their minds. Whereupon the director returned them to their room and called in Father Oszmianski. He immediately accepted a Soviet passport, returned triumphant from the director's office and set upon convincing the invalids to take Soviet passports. In the meantime the residents were thrown into a panic. The director called in another old woman who also refused to take a Soviet passport. Next the director took the mentally sick Luba to face the "authorities." She had a temporary passport which had been issued by the Polish Embassy in the summer of 1942 and refused to turn it in to the commandant but agreed to accept a Soviet passport. When Luba returned with the passport the other invalids started reproaching her, but she just told them with a smile that in one pocket she had a Polish passport and in the other pocket a Soviet one and, when the need arose, she would show the passport which would be more appropriate or convenient in a particular situation. Luba was the last 'customer' that evening but the 'action' was to continue next day." When Stefan finished his story my uncle theorized that only the invalids would be given Soviet passports because the Indom had become a Soviet institution so its residents would be subject to Soviet laws. Stefan went to the Zelmanskis' for the night somewhat assured, and we talked long into the night about the events which had taken place in the Home that evening.

Actually the problem of the various personal documents carried by the Polish population in the Soviet Union was very complicated. Some people carried Soviet passports because they had not been resettled from the territories of Western Ukraine and Western White Russia in 1939-1940 but were evacuated to the interior of the Soviet Union after the outbreak of Soviet-German hostilities on June 22, 1941. The Soviet authorities considered those people to be Soviet citizens but the Polish Embassy considered them to be Polish citizens because the Polish Government in London did not recognize the incorporation of the eastern parts of Poland into the Soviet Union. According to the Polish-Soviet Agreement of July 30, 1941, all of the treaties signed by Germany and the Soviet Union prior to September 1, 1939, (e.g. the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939 which had established a demarcation line between Germany and the Soviet Union on the Bug River) were abrogated. Nevertheless the postwar borders of Poland remained an open question.

Another segment of the Polish population in the Soviet Union carried certificates of amnesty issued upon the release of those people from prisons, concentration camps and labor camps. In the first half of 1942 the Polish Embassy and its delegates began to exchange those certificates for temporary Polish passports with a photograph of the bearer. Although this was done with the full knowledge of the *Narkomindel*, at that time the equivalent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Soviet government declared that the Embassy was entitled to issue the new passports only to Poles but not to Jews, Ukrainians and Belorussians because those nationalities were to become Soviet citizens since postwar Poland would not have any ethnic minorities. As a sign of protest the Polish Embassy stopped issuing temporary passports. Eight months had elapsed since that time and things remained in limbo. That night we fell asleep not knowing what to expect next, but accepting my uncle's theory for the time being.

The events of the next day seemed to support it. The new director summoned all of residents of the Indom to a meeting and announced in the presence of the commandant of the militia that anyone refusing to accept a Soviet passport would have to leave the institution. After that announcement the issuing of Soviet passports continued. Pan Kolanko was called in first and accepted a passport. Pan Formalny and

a few other people who were terrified of being without shelter in the middle of winter and who had no means of supporting themselves followed suit. The remaining residents and the staff started getting ready to leave the institution. They found an empty cabin at one end of the village whose owner lived nearby, and she let them occupy it. In the meantime people started coming to us for advice. Although we did not want to take a definite stand or to give advice, we implied that they should sooner leave the Indom than accept Soviet passports. My uncle was going to contact the staff at the Embassy and to have them try to intervene at a higher level. Those leaving the Indom were permitted by the new director to take only their personal belongings. My uncle promised them that they would have priority in the distribution of goods and funds left under Michael's jurisdiction. At noon the militia commandant left for Koshki with the Passport Bureau head, and the evicted invalids started trudging through the village toward their new quarters which they named "Misery with no Money Hotel" (it even rhymes in Polish "Hotel nedzy bez pieniedzy"). We watched this tragic trek from the window of our room. Limping Wacław, footless Czesław and the others moved with difficulty in the deep snow carrying their meager possessions. At the end of the column some boys pulled the young amputee, their bosom friend, because it was too far for him to walk on his knees through the snow.

The next day my uncle went on foot to Koshki in order to phone the Embassy. Although he got a connection, the music on the line was so loud that after fruitlessly yelling for an hour into the telephone he gave up and sent a cable without much hope that the Embassy would receive it. Intensified censorship was a strong possibility. He returned to Sergeyevka the next day with Michael, who started distributing the last shipment from the Embassy during the subsequent days. My uncle did not want to participate in this function, but Michael asked him to assist with the record keeping. Of course, priority was given to those invalids and staff who had been kicked out of the Indom. This time as in the past there was a lot of yelling, crying, swearing and general dissatisfaction except that this time Michael and pani Helena who helped him bore the brunt of the people's wrath. When they finished with our village, Father Władysław arrived from the "Engels Collective Farm" and a sled came from Petrovka to pick up the clothes for those villages. When the boys noticed that the priest wore a Polish officer's jacket under his quilted Russian jacket, they started begging him for its buttons which had the Polish eagle embossed on them.

During those few days a radical change had taken place in the children. The intuition and sensitivity so typical of children made them realize that the Soviet authorities had wronged helpless people and left them with no shelter and with no means of caring for themselves just because they refused to accept Soviet passports. Since this realization they felt very deeply that they were Poles, citizens of Poland. And in that freezing February of 1943 they believed with all their hearts that Poland would regain her independence despite Anna Pavlovna's statement during the meeting with the invalids when she said: "Fools! Take Soviet passports when they are given to you. There will be no Poland and there will be no Sikorski!" The children sympathized with us. Every day the girls saved some bread and sugar and brought it for pani Helena. Władek, Bronek and Mendelek came to visit with us and talk. Now that the children were getting chocolates and hard candy every day, the boys always brought some for Kathy and Miłosz. Władek liked to sit next to me and hold my hand. Once he forced a piece of chocolate into my mouth. In their hearts the children were with us. In addition to the feelings they showed toward us, they also became a more cohesive group within the Indom. The boys attended daily prayers and both mornings and evenings the Indom resounded with a well-known old Polish patriotic hymn. Its line "Ojczyzna wolna racz nam wrocic Panie!" (A free Fatherland kindly return to us, Oh, Lord!) could even be heard in the nearby village cabins. Each boy had a red-and-white rosette sewn to the left side of his jacket at the heart level. Some had Polish eagles cut out from the military buttons which Franek Kowalski had given them. Mendelek even traded something with Miłosz for a Polish eagle from a military cap. When the boys saw Father Władysław in a military jacket they did not leave him alone until he had distributed all of the buttons. I also managed to get one and wore it above the left pocket of my "Eisenhower jacket" until my return to Poland three years later. The new director pretended not to notice this awakening of Polish patriotism among the children, although he was obviously annoyed by the red-and-white rosettes and "the chicken" as he referred derisively to the Polish coat of arms.

Nothing happened until March 8, 1943. On that day every Pole who did not have a Soviet passport received a note with the following statement: "Notification. Citizen (first and last names) is to appear at the District Office of the Militia in Koshki and report to Comrade Altman." The note was signed by the Commandant of the Militia. Those who had received the note were in turmoil and came to my uncle for

advice. "To go or not to go?" was their dilemma. He told them that those able to walk should go but invalids who can barely walk even in a room, should not go. "Let them provide you with some transportation if they are eager to give you their passports." Then we held a "family conference" and decided that my aunt and pani Bronka would not go because they would never make the 18 km (11 mile) trip on foot, and that my uncle, Steve and I would go .

On the appointed day we left Sergeyevka in the morning and arrived in Koshki that noon. After a short rest at Aunt Tosya's we went to the District Office of the Militia, a two-story white building located in the center of town. A small wooden annex was attached to one side of this building. It contained two prison cells whose small windows with bars (but without window panes despite the winter) faced a small area surrounded by a fence made from 2.5 meter (yard) high boards and topped with three rows of barbed wire. Not far from the militia building stood a red brick building housing the District Office of the NKVD. When we entered the guard room of the militia building, it was already so full of Poles from Petrovka, from the collective farm "Engels" and from the other villages that there was no room even to stick a pin. The officer on duty, in a sheepskin coat and a winter cap with earflaps, took our documents. "Wait!" he growled in our direction as we turned to leave. We wanted to wait outside because it was stifling in the room, but the guard at the door did not let anyone leave. Involuntarily I recalled a Russian saying about prisons: "A wide gate leads inside but only a very narrow one leads out."

In the meantime as people's names were called, those individuals were led away. Others were brought from somewhere else into the room, searched by the militiaman on duty, and after having been relieved of any sharp objects, belts and shoe laces, were led into a cell. In the room the atmosphere was charged. People, nervous and tense, talked loudly, sought the advice of others or searched their own conscience about not being able to decide whether to accept a Soviet passport (and with it Soviet citizenship) or to go to prison. As soon as they noticed the three of us, they started asking for advice and inquiring if the Embassy knew what was happening. We told them that the Embassy knew nothing as yet, and we advised them against accepting Soviet passports.

We still did not know what was going on. Finally Henryk and Goldberg, the tailor, entered the guard room. They had just returned from the office of the mysterious "Comrade Altman." Both had happy expressions on their faces and each clenched some certificate. They immediately related to my uncle what was happening "upstairs." Each person was asked a number of questions and the answers were entered into a questionnaire. Among those questions two seemed particularly significant, namely: "Did you arrive on the territory of Western Ukraine or Belorussia before November 1, 1939?" and "Where did you live prior to the outbreak of the war on September 1, 1939?" Subsequently some people were led to face Comrade Altman who told them to take Soviet passports and if they refused he ordered a guard to put them into a prison cell. The other people received certificates stating that citizen (first and last names) is given two months in order to settle his/her citizenship. The documents bore Comrade Altman's signature and the seal of the militia. Henryk and Goldberg received such certificates.

My uncle, Steve and I analyzed the report of those two lucky fellows. Pan Golberg hailed from Warsaw and arrived in Bialystok; i.e. on the territory occupied by the Soviets, in December 1939. Henryk was born in Torun, in the western part of Poland. Although in fact he had lived with his partents in the eastern part of Poland several years prior to September 1, 1939, he said that he had arrived in Lwow in the middle of November 1939. It was obvious that the date November 1, 1939, was important in this particular situation. On that day there had been a referendum in the territories occupied by the Red Army and the result of that referendum was that "the population overwhelmingly expressed itself in favor of those territories becoming a part of the Soviet Union. Nobody even attempted to cast a dissenting vote because the Red Army had supervised the "secret" balloting. Although the refugees from the parts of Poland occupied by the Germans had been forbidden to participate in the referendum, now the Soviet authorities conveniently forgot about that prohibition and made the date of the referendum relevant to forcing Polish exiles to accept Soviet passports.

After some time my uncle and I were called in simultaneously. A militiaman beckoned me to follow him. We left the guard room and walked toward the NKVD building. After climbing the stairs to the second floor, we walked along a hall with leather covered padded doors toward the last one, which lead into the office of the commandant. The militiaman knocked on the door. After hearing "Enter!" he opened the door,

let me through and saluted. "You can go now." the commandant said. "I will phone when I am through!" The militiaman saluted again and left the room. During those few moments I managed to look around. The room was large and had several windows. A massive desk with a large armchair stood in front of the wall opposite the entrance door. A long table in the middle of the room formed the letter "T" with the desk. Armchairs were placed around that table. The floor was covered with a carpet. Maps of the Soviet Union, the Kuibyshev Province and of our district hung on two side walls. Two huge portraits: one of Lenin and the other one of Stalin were on the wall behind the commandant's desk. The NKVD commandant, a short middle-aged senior lieutenant with mean steely eyes stood behind the desk. "Sit down." he said pointing to an armchair. He took one of the questionnaires from his desk and sat down across the table from me. "I am warning you that all of your answers must agree with the facts. Otherwise you will be subject to Article 92 of the Criminal Code of the USSR. According to it you can be imprisoned for two years." "Very well." I answered. Then the commandant began asking questions such as my first and last names, my profession, my parents' names and their professions, my mother's maiden name, the names of my grandparents and my address until the outbreak of the war on September 1, 1939.

So far the commandant did not question any of my answers and scrupulously recorded everything. "Citizenship until September 1, 1939?" "Polish." I answered. "Nationality?" he asked. "Polish." I answered. The commandant stopped writing, looked at me and said: "That is a lie. You are a Jew." "THAT is a lie." I retorted. "I am a Pole." "I was told that all of you are Jewish, and I can check it." The commandant added. At this point I said to him: "Citizen Commandant! I don't care what your informers tell you. I know who I am and you can do your checking." The commandant put down something in the proper space. I peeked at it. He put down "Pole." Then he asked when I had arrived on the Soviet territory. When my uncle and I were still in the guard room we had decided to say that we had arrived at the end of November 1939 stealing across the border in the vicinity of Malkinia. We learned the name of the border village and other details about crossing the border from my aunt and my little cousin, Kathy, who had taken that route in order to join my uncle in Lwow in 1939. Well, I made up such a fascinating story that the commandant had difficulty recording everything fast enough. He obviously did not question my story. Just in case, though, and as a proof that I had arrived in the Soviet occupied territory after November 1, 1939, I had kept in reserve a very good document, a certificate issued by the University of Warsaw, and dated November 13, 1939, which my parents had sent with my aunt to Lwow. Finally, the commandant completed filling out the questionnaire, took away my amnesty certificate and told me to sign my deposition. I refused, because I was not sure that only what I had said was recorded or if the commandant had added something on his own. Consequently, he started reading aloud my deposition. Since everything was in order I signed the document. Then the commandant said to me: "You have two months to secure a Polish passport from your Embassy." "Very well." I said, "But give me a certificate in place of the document you took away from me." "Now we don't issue any certificates. Comrade Altman phoned and ordered us to stop that procedure." the commandant said. Then he phoned the guard room. After a while a militiaman brought Steve in and escorted me out of the room. "You are free," he said. "You can go home."

I went to Aunt Tosya's, because my uncle, Steve and I had decided beforehand to meet there. My uncle arrived shortly after me and Steve a little later. My uncle was very excited because he had had an experience similar to mine with the NKVD commandant about "nationality." The militia commandant who took my uncle's deposition also expressed doubts at the same point in the questionnaire. Obviously the NKVD had knowledgeable informers among the invalids. After a short rest at Aunt Tosya's and without getting to see Michael we started on foot for home. On the way we stopped at the post office and attempted to phone the Embassy but no matter how hard the two switchboard operators tried, they could not get through. It was already late in the evening when we arrived in our village. On the way home we picked up pani Helena and brought her to our living quarters for a powwow. We came to the conclusion that at the moment it was most urgent to notify the Embassy about what was happening in the district, namely that the Soviet authorities were forcing our people to accept Soviet passports.

Stefan, who was also present in the room, volunteered to go on skis to Kuibyshev. He hoped to get skis somewhere in the village with the assistance of Roza Kalman who was ready to do anything for her lover. The former household manager, Steve, who now moved in with us, was to go with Stefan as a personal representative of my uncle to the Director of the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy. Henryk and pani Helena also wanted to go but we explained to her that a 140 km (close to 100 mile) trip

on foot at her age was not advisable.

It was almost midnight and our company was about ready to leave when Bazyli and Franek Kowalski entered the room. Bazyli's face was as white as a sheet and Franek was sobbing despite his 18 years. "What happened?" My uncle asked. "That's the end, Sir!" Bazyli sputtered in one breath. "We took their passports because Pan Michal (Michael) came out of that Altman's office and told the people waiting their turn in the hallway 'People! Don't be stupid! Don't get imprisoned! The Embassy orders you to take Soviet passports! I also took one!' He flashed his new passport and then started distributing money among the people by the hundreds. I got 1000 rubles and Franek got 1500 rubles." "Traitor!" Pani Bronka, Stephen and Henryk exclaimed simultaneously. Pani Helena nervously paced the floor. When Bazyli and Franek left the room, Pani Helena announced that she must go to the Embassy. "I have to clear my name. After all I recommended that traitor as an honest man. Who knows, maybe that friend of his who works in the Social Welfare Department is a similar scoundrel!" There was another reason that prompted pani Helena to go to the Embassy. It was her desire to intervene on behalf of all the people who were unjustly arrested and among whom were two of her "girls," pani Krysia and pani Elzunia, as well as the old Helena, "the courtier," as we called her. All of those arrested were to be tried and sentenced to two years at hard labor in prison camps.

As we were sitting that night of March 10, 1943, totally disoriented because of the recent developments and cut off from our Embassy, we came to the realization about who was the source of the recent ferment in the Home for Polish Invalids as well as in the district. It was none other than the Trustee of the Polish Embassy, Michael, who had also doubled as an NKVD agent! It was he who had schemed with the invalids to have my uncle removed from the directorship of the Home. It was he who had egged my uncle on against Pani Helena and Stephen while suggesting to them that Father Wladyslaw should replace my uncle as the director.

Pani Helena was beside herself; "Even before I go to the Embassy I am going to face that traitor and give him a piece of my mind!" The next morning she went to the Chuvash village, to the cabin where the physician's assistant lived. Whether or not she got to see Michael and what she told him remains a mystery, because she never confided in anyone and shortly thereafter Pani Helena disappeared without a trace. In all probability she found her "fair-haired boy" at his mistress', because the people returning from Koshki to Sergeyevka that night told about being passed by a sleigh with Michael and the physician's assistant.

Roza Kalman borrowed a pair of skis for her Stefan from the voyenruk, the physical education and military training teacher in the Sergeyevka school, and Stephen left at four o'clock that morning. Shortly after ten o'clock our Steve, Pani Helena and Stasio, one of the orphans, also left for Kuibyshev. Stasio simply escaped from the Indom because he did not want to part with pani Helena. During the day we found out that lame pan Wacław and Joziek, who had the injured arm, also went to the Embassy. We wondered how pan Wacław had been able to walk with a still open wound on the remnant of his foot.

At noon pani Kowalska barged into our room holding her eighteen-year old son's Soviet passport in her hand. Behind her dragged Franek with a baleful look, strangely red ears and eyes swollen from crying. Still at the door she turned to my uncle and started her tirade: "Just see for yourself, my dear Sir, what that shithead did to me! He took that damn Bolshevik passport and will have to remain here for the rest of his life! His father is serving in the Polish Army and he will be a Bolshevik! I am not going to take that scrap of paper even if I have to die in prison!" Suddenly she turned to her son, shoved a fist under his nose and yelled: "And you, Franek, immediately go to the militia and return that passport! If they refuse to take it back, throw it on the desk and leave! Because if you don't I'll break every bone in your body!" It took us a lot of time to calm her down. Of course, Franek never went to the militia.

Now we settled down and waited for the return of the people who had gone to Kuibyshev. In the meantime we had a stream of visitors all day long and finally decided to put an end to it. After all, we occupied the front room at our landlady's, and it must have been pretty annoying for her to have people constantly marching through her room. Another reason for our decision was the constant complaints and demands of the people visiting us. Messrs. Kozuch, Duron and others still complained about Pani Maria, the cook, about Henryk and Stephen. Pani Mila, the baker, demanded her March ration of flour. Of

course, all of the flour had remained in the Indom, but the new director refused to give it to her and sent her to my uncle who "had her flour." The only person whom we tolerated was hunchbacked Pani Justynka. She used to come with her playing cards and tell fortunes. In her cards our future looked dismal: "official house," "unpleasantries," "conversations with an official" implied further problems with the authorities forcing us to accept Soviet passports. Pani Bronka could also tell fortunes from cards and her predictions agreed with those of pani Justynka. Unintentionally my aunt and I started believing them, but my uncle only laughed at us.

Dark Clouds on the Horizon

Stefan returned on March 14 at dusk. He was the first person to bring the news to the Polish Embassy about the Soviet authorities forcing Polish exiles to accept Soviet passports. The Embassy asked him to convey to the Poles that they should not accept Soviet passports and should not be afraid of being imprisoned. "Let them arrest all of the Poles. At any rate we will fire off a strongly worded note to the Soviet government protesting its action." After reporting to us about his visit to the Embassy, Stefan went to the Kalmans and stayed there for the night. Roza, in her capacity as the secretary of the local Young Communist League organization, had attended a party meeting in the mayor's office that evening at which a militia NCO and two militiamen were also present. Although she had learned about the danger to the Poles, she made Stefan stay for the night and did not let him come to warn us.

At night the local agronomist and a young woman came to visit our landlady. They stayed until the morning. When we got up and my uncle went to the kitchen to heat some water, the agronomist told him that all of us should get dressed quickly and go to the mayor's office from where we would proceed to Koshki. The children should remain behind and only the adults irrespective of the condition of their health should go. Those unable to make the trip on foot would be transported to Koshki by sleighs. We were very upset because this development indicated that the "passport giving campaign" was going from bad to worse. After breakfast my uncle decided that we would go to the mayor's office with my cousin Kathy and Milosz.

As we were about ready to leave the cabin, Liza, Aunt Masha's daughter-in-law, came running in. At the windmill they already knew what was going on, and Liza came to offer her assistance. We handed her the keys to our suitcases. Although she did not want to accept them without an inventory of their contents, we trusted her 100 percent. We also asked Liza to take care of Kathy and Milosz if we were arrested. Liza promised not only to take care of the children but also to deliver them to Mr. Milewicz at the Embassy. She was visibly shaken, accompanied us to the mayor's office, and tried to come inside, but the militia NCO ordered her to leave immediately and to take the children with her. Kathy started crying and Milosz could barely hold back his tears when he said goodbye to his mother. "Take the children away immediately!" yelled the militiaman as he moved toward Kathy. "Don't you dare touch the child!" my uncle said to him in a forbidding tone of voice. "She is not yours!" The militiaman tried to keep a stiff upper lip and retorted: "It is forbidden to bring children here!" "I heard you," my uncle said. "I am not deaf!" and he handed Kathy and Milosz to Liza. My aunt cried and we had a great deal of difficulty calming her down. All of the women who were separated from their children were wiping tears away. Only old Mrs. Kowalska looked at the militia NCO with eyes full of hatred and yelled in Russian: "I will not be as dumb as that asshole son of mine, Franek! You will not force me to accept your f..... passport!" Finally three sleds, each drawn by a pair of horses, pulled up in front of the building. The women were put on the sleds. "Anyone who tries to escape, will be shot on the spot!" announced the NCO. We were obviously under arrest.

The sleds with the women in them started toward Koshki, the men walked behind. On the steps leading to the mayor's office stood Liza and Nina. Aunt Masha was supposed to come and bid us farewell, but she had fainted from the excitement and so remained at home. Liza managed to slip us a loaf of white bread, which Aunt Masha had sent with Nina. Since the militia escort did not permit Nina and Liza to approach the sleds, they shouted to us from a distance not to worry about Kathy and Milosz, because they would take care of them. When the sleds passed the building housing the Indom, the children ran out to say their goodbyes, but the new director and the militia escort chased them away with sticks so that they could not come close to us. Consequently, the children just accompanied the sleds from a safe distance and cried. When we passed our cabin, Grusha, our landlady, stood on a snowbank with Kathy and Milosz. Kathy cried and shouted: "Mommy! Don't go away!" while Milosz could barely hold back his tears. After all, he was an 11-year old "man." Grusha shouted through tears to my aunt and pani Bronka, "Don't worry! No harm will come to the children!"

Finally, we left our village and moved slowly toward Koshki. On the way Maks approached my uncle and said with a mysterious expression on his face: "Sir! I will hide in one of the barns in Little Sergeyevka where we will probably stop to rest. Then I will return home at dusk, wait to see what happens to you and will be ready to go to the Embassy." The idea was an excellent one and we gladly agreed to it. Although several people must have already arrived at the Embassy, as every day brought

about some new developments and the overall situation was getting worse. Sure enough, our caravan stopped in front of the a farm's stable in Little Sergeyevka.

After an hour's rest we continued to Koshki and in the late afternoon arrived at the Regional Militia Headquarters. We were led into the basement and waited in a small hallway with two doors: one leading into the cell for men and the second one leading into the cell for women. The cells upstairs, which could be entered from the guard room, were full and now people were being packed into the basement cells. The procedure for giving passports became both simpler and faster. People whose names were called out were individually led into Comrade Altman's office where he asked: "Will you accept a Soviet passport?" If the "victim" refused then the Comrade attempted to coerce him/her with persuasion or threats. When this did not give the desired result, then Altman started shouting: "You will rot in a prison camp. We will sentence you to two years, but actually you will never get out of there!" Then he wrote a certificate that "Citizen X refuses to accept a Soviet passport, consequently takes upon himself/herself full responsibility for the future turn of events." When Citizen X signed the certificate, Comrade Altman rang for a militiaman and ordered: "Into a cell!" The victim was brought to the guard room, searched and all of the items which were forbidden to keep in prison were taken away without any receipt, and the poor soul was pushed into a cell.

The cells were very crowded because in addition to the imprisoned Poles there were also Russian criminals. The militiamen and the militia commandant egged on the Russian prisoners to make Polish prisoners' lives miserable and, therefore, to make the Poles more inclined to accept the Soviet passports. As soon as they first entered a cell the Poles experienced the hell of a Soviet prison. The criminals pounced on them, took away all of their food and part of their clothing, beat them up and pushed them under the plank platform that served as a sleeping shelf. This platform took up three-quarters of the cell's area. Usually new prisoners occupied the space on the floor under the platform only when there was no more sleeping room on the platform. In our case a few of the Russians kept the Poles from getting onto the sleeping platform. When the number of Poles in the cell increased and people like Father Wladyslaw, Henryk and a few other strong young men were brought in, the Russian prisoners were subdued and even some of the clothing which had been stolen by them from the Polish prisoners was retrieved. Of course, there was a lot of fighting, yelling and swearing, and the racket coming out of the cells made those waiting in the hallway think that maybe it would be better for them to accept the Soviet passports.

In the meantime the names of the people from our village were called. Mrs. Kowalska, Mrs. Zelmanska and some of the other women refused to accept Soviet passports and were imprisoned. Mila, the former baker, and Mr. Nachman from Petrovka, who had tuberculosis, asked my uncle what to do. He just kept mum. Basically he was against accepting Soviet passports. On the other hand what right did he have to suggest that Leah, who was caring for a baby and a senile mother, should rot in a Soviet prison rather than to accept the damn passport, or that Mila should leave a deaf son and a blind husband for the same reason, or that Mr. Nachman, who was always spitting up blood, should return to that hell, the Soviet Gulag. So when their turn came to be called before the "Mighty Altman," we told them to accept the passports. They returned crying hysterically: "Now we will remain for the rest of our lives in the Soviet Union!" The remaining people tried to calm them down, but nobody knew what to do anymore; what was right and what was wrong.

Altman used every possible trick to persuade people they should accept Soviet passports. He called in Roza Goldberg and tried to convince her of the advantages of having a Soviet passport. Since he was getting nowhere, he ordered her father to be brought in. "Tell that stupid girl, that daughter of yours, that she should accept a Soviet passport. It would be a pity for her to rot in prison. You know yourself what life in prison is like." However, Goldberg answered him: "I cannot order my daughter to do something I would not do myself!" Now Altman started "working" on old Goldberg. He talked to him in Yiddish: "See, I am talking to you like a brother to a brother, like a Jew to a Jew and not like an NKVD officer to a common citizen. Accept our passport and you will see how well off you will be. You will be able to work wherever you please: in a cooperative, at home, in a village or in Kuibyshev. You will have unlimited opportunities. Why are you holding to that Polishness? Did you have such a good life in Poland? After all there was terrible anti-Semitism there. You were never certain what would happen to you: maybe a student would suddenly come up to you and hit you with a club or with a brass knuckle. You were always a 'dirty kike' (parszywy Zyd) to them but in our country you will enjoy equal rights with all

of the other citizens." Nevertheless Goldberg refused to accept a Soviet passport and told Altman: "I know very well what the situation was for Jews in Poland because I lived there. You know it only from books and from your propaganda brochures. While it is true that you were in the occupied territories in 1939, what people told you was grossly exaggerated because they were making it up for your benefit. I have lived in your country for three years and can compare your life with that in Poland, and I would never exchange the life in Poland for the life in the Soviet Union." The conversation was over. The militiaman took Roza to an upper cell for women and Goldberg to a men's cell in the basement. Before the militiaman escorting Goldberg had managed to unlock the padlock and push him into the cell, the latter briefed us about his encounter with Altman and said goodbye to his son, Izrael.

No sooner had the militiaman locked the cell door behind Goldberg and disappeared from the hallway than the Russian criminals jumped him and took his jacket. The Polish prisoners attempted to defend Goldberg and retrieve his jacket. A fight ensued accompanied by loud screams. Izrael, hearing his father shout: "Militia! Help!" and wanting to come to his father's assistance, grabbed the cell door and started jerk it with so much force that a large piece of plaster fell off the cell wall uncovering loose bricks. Two militiamen came running from the guard room and asked: "What is going on here?" The people in the hallway started shouting: "You want us to be murdered by those thugs! We will tell Citizen Altman!" But the militiamen paid no attention to us and one asked pointing to the piece of plaster: "Who did it?" "I did." said Izrael. "Follow me!" ordered the militiaman who took him to the men's cell on the upper floor. In the meantime a second militiaman opened the cell door and turned to the Polish prisoners asking: "What is going on here? Why is there all that screaming?" One of the Russian thugs, an 18-year old burglar, came up with an answer: "They want to beat us up, so we have to defend ourselves and they are shouting!" "Don't you know what to do?" the militiaman said as he was leaving, "Push them under the sleeping platform!" It was quite obvious from his answer that the authorities encouraged any action which would force the Poles to accept Soviet passports. But the Poles were not easily intimidated. They occupied the sleeping platform and sat on it with their backs close to the cell wall securing their "rear." The "aggressors" did not dare approach them face to face.

Soon Izaak Sznycer was brought into the basement cell. He was very pale and weak because of a 103° degree fever. His condition did not impress the Soviets who took away part of his provisions (it turned out that he had brought with him quite a supply!) and a blanket. Suddenly someone from the guard room came to tell my uncle that pani Bronka and my aunt were already in a cell. After a brief moment my uncle was called to face Altman who announced to him: "You and your nephew can return home but your wife is being detained." My uncle explained to him that his wife possessed a proof of Polish citizenship in the form of a Polish passport. "Well then. Show me that passport and I will release her." was Altman's answer. It was 8 o'clock in the evening when my uncle informed me of Altman's decision. He said to me: "You will have to go to Sergeyevka and bring back Ola's (my aunt's) passport. I will remain here and try sneak some food to her." That was a very difficult task and only possible to achieve under the cover of darkness through the small barred windows of the upper cells which faced a small yard.

I immediately started for Sergeyevka on foot realizing full well the dangers facing me from wolves which either singly or in packs roamed the countryside and were particularly aggressive, because it was already mating time for them. I tried not to think about the wolves but somehow could not get them out of my mind. What would I do in case they did attack me? I remembered reading in a book that wolves are afraid of fire and lit matches. That was no help. I had not seen matches for a long time. "War and shortages. Matches are for the front." the Russians used to say. And so I walked through that snow covered expanse between Koshki and Sergeyevka looking around for the shining eyes of wolves.

I passed Little Sergeyevka where I was greeted by a chorus of village dogs and took a short cut through the fields with the haystacks toward our village. No wolves jumped out from behind the haystacks either and after midnight I arrived safely in Sergeyevka. The light was on in our room. I peeked in through the window: Milosz was in a PJs and Kathy was in a robe and they were sitting at the table playing cards and munching on matzos. I knocked on the window pane: "Milosz! Open the door. It is me." The children jumped up from the table, opened the door and cuddled up to me asking a million questions. Grusha, our landlady, also woke up and came into the room to find out what was going on in Koshki. I said that both mothers had been detained and that I had come for my aunt's passport. The children did not seem too concerned about the turn of events. Kathy hoped that her mother's Polish passport would get my aunt out

of jail and Milosz expected that his father would intercede on behalf of pani Bronka through the Embassy. During the previous day the children were visited by Mendelek, Bronek, Wladek and the older girls to check and see whether Kathy and Milosz needed anything. The boys announced that they were planning to go to the Embassy and to take Milosz with them. Kathy reported what she and Milosz had eaten and that Liza and Nina had checked on them a few times during the day. Even Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, stopped by to find out whether or not the children had food, etc. We talked until almost 2 o'clock in the morning and finally I put them to sleep. I took my aunt's passport, packed a loaf of bread, a small jar with butter and two chocolate bars to give to my aunt, and also went to sleep. No sooner had I dozed off than someone knocked at the door and the chairman of the collective farm came into Grusha's room. "Did Steve return?" he asked. "No." Grusha answered and Sergey Stepanovich left.

At dawn I left for Koshki. My uncle had spent the night at Aunt Tosya's. Recently Michael had not been showing up at her place at all. As soon as I arrived, the two of us went to the Militia Headquarters. Altman was busy and we had to wait. The prison cells were still full of people although during the night and at dawn some of the people had opted to accept the Soviet passports. So far the Poles thought that the NKVD would keep them imprisoned for a while and then let them go even without having accepted Soviet passports. This seemed to be wishful thinking on their part because in the morning the provincial public prosecutor arrived and informed several people who had been arrested the previous week (among them pani Helena's "girls") that their trial would take place in a few days. Some demanded a defense lawyer, but the prosecutor just laughed in their faces saying: "A defense lawyer won't do you any good because you will get two years in a prison camp anyway!"

Someone who was in the same cell with Izaak Sznycer, and who subsequently had accepted a Soviet passport, reported that despite Izaak's condition Altman had called him twice at night for interrogation and had accused him of having been given some special sabotage assignments with instructions which were forwarded through pani Bronka. We knew that such accusations were just ordinary cheap blackmail.

In the late afternoon my uncle was called into Altman's office where he presented my aunt's Polish passport to him. Altman carefully examined the document and said to my uncle: "You better tell that wife of yours to accept a Soviet passport. She will not make it in prison. That Polish passport is outdated. It was issued in 1927 and it expired in 1932." Unsuccessfully my uncle tried to explain that in Poland a passport was valid for the lifetime of its bearer and not for five years like in the Soviet Union. Altman placed my aunt's passport with some other documents and she remained in prison. Miraculously we were able to pass to her some bread and the other staples I had managed to bring from home.

We spent that night at Aunt Tosya's and next morning, March 17, 1943, started back to Sergeyevka. We were walking slowly, because we were worn out and tired from the events of the last few days. We thought that it would be wise to send someone to the Embassy again, because the situation had changed so drastically. There were only two possible "messengers" left: Stefan who had not been taken to the Militia Headquarters in Koshki, because the Kalmans had kept him for the night, and Maks who had escaped while being transported. Surgiel had also escaped but could not be counted on, because of his utter stupidity.

We had just passed Little Sergeyevka when we noticed a sled being pulled by a miserable horse approaching from the opposite direction. We stepped into the snow when the sled came close. Steve, who was being escorted by the *voyenruk* (the school's physical education instructor) to the militia in Koshki, jumped out of the sled. Because we wanted to talk with him and find out about his trip to the Embassy, my uncle treated the *voyenruk* to an English cigarette. The fellow was both happy and obliging. "I will feed the horse for a while," he said giving the horse some hay. Then he sat in the sled while enjoying his cigarette.

We briefly described to Steve the overall situation in the district. He decided to refuse accepting a Soviet passport and told us about his trip to Kuibyshev. He had reached the city with no particular difficulties. Along the way he separated from pani Helena and Stasio because it was not safe to move in a large group which immediately drew people's attention by its clothing, looks, etc. The real difficulties arose after reaching Kuibyshev. All of the streets near the Polish Embassy and its dormitory on

Galaktionovska Street were full of NKVD agents in civilian clothes. The entrance to the Embassy, like the entrances to all foreign offices, was guarded by a militiaman. Another militiaman guarded the gate leading into the courtyard of the Embassy. In the past one militiaman guarded both entrances but under the existing situation the number of sentries had been increased. The militiaman guarding the gate stopped every car entering or leaving the courtyard and looked inside it. The militiaman guarding the entrance to the Embassy carefully scrutinized all passing by and if any of them by their looks or by moving toward the entrance seemed Polish to the guard, the suspect was immediately arrested by the militiaman and handed over to the NKVD agents who led the victim to a black car parked around the corner and drove him/her to the NKVD Headquarters. However, if a person managed to reach one of the three steps leading to Embassy door, the militiaman could not arrest that person because even the lowest of those three steps was "foreign soil."

Steve managed to get inside of the Embassy but was received rather indifferently because pani Helena had arrived at the Embassy before him and her report had been officially recorded. After having seen Mr. Milewicz, Steve decided to leave the Embassy the same day and return to Sergeyevka as soon as possible. That evening he was placed on the floor of an Embassy limousine with a Polish driver and one of the staff members as a passenger, and driven to the "Gypsy Bazaar," which was located at the edge of town from where a highway led straight to our district. Steve set out on foot and two days later at midnight returned home. Milosz and Kathy were already asleep but woke up as soon as Grusha opened the cabin's door. They were as happy as could be. Finally an adult and a close one had shown up! The children were tired of managing alone. Their joy, however, was short-lived.

The light in Grusha's cabin that late at night or maybe her son, Kolka, sent by Grusha to the mayor's office (which is what Steve suspected actually happened) brought in the voyenruk who in an "official" tone of voice announced: "Steve, the mayor summons you to her office." Steve put on a jacket and left escorted by the voyenruk. The mayor's office was semidark. A kerosene lamp on the mayor's desk provided the only light. Anna Pavlovna, the mayor, stood behind the desk. Steve greeted her, and she answered his greeting without raising her eyes at him then added: "Steve, if you have any weapon on you, surrender it immediately." Steve just stood there speechless. "Weapon?!" he was not sure that he had heard her correctly. Anna Pavlovna again asked about a weapon but noticing Steve's bewilderment added: "I believe you that you have no weapon on you and, therefore, I will not conduct a personal search. In the morning the voyenruk will escort you to Altman in Koshki." She left the office. Steve stretched out on a bench and the voyenruk settled down on the floor by the door. A few minutes later the school principal, Maria Alexandrovna, brought a tulup, a large sheepskin furcoat, for Steve to put on the hard bench, and a mug of coffee. She asked a few inane questions about the Embassy which Steve answered just as inanely. In the morning Steve left with the voyenruk for Koshki and that was when we met the two of them. We said goodbye to Steve and continued on our way.

When we returned home the children could hardly contain their joy at seeing us. They were somewhat upset about the imprisonment of their mothers but seemed to get it out of their minds rather quickly. Milosz told us about his plan to go to Kuibyshev with some of the boys from the Indom but gave up the idea upon our return. The same day we visited Maks who was hiding out in tailor Goldberg's cabin and decided that he should go to Kuibyshev, notify the Embassy about the arrest of pani Bronka and my aunt, about the Soviets' threats of prison sentences for not accepting Soviet passports, about the sentenced Poles being shipped to prison camps and finally get some answers to the basic question of what to do; namely whether to accept Soviet passports or not. It was about time for the Embassy to take a stand in this situation which was totally incomprehensible to us and issue some instructions to the Polish exile population. Through some of the boys from the Indom we contacted Stefan who was hiding out at Roza Kalman's. We did not want to go there because the Kalmans lived at the opposite end of the village and our visit would look suspicious to their neighbors or to people who happened to be in the collective farm's office which we had to pass on our way to the Kalmans. We knew that we were being watched and tried to observe the utmost caution especially since we could not understand why neither my uncle nor myself had been arrested.

Stefan and two brothers from the Indom, Wladek and Bronek, decided to go to Melekess, about 70 km (44 miles) from our village, reconnoiter the situation and discuss matters with Mr. Dunin and Mr. Kochanski. In the meantime my uncle and I took turns at the window watching the main road. Every nice

sled pulled by a healthy looking horse and not by some nag that approached made us anxious and sent shudders down our spines. Militia? NKVD? So far nothing had happened. Nobody came to fetch us, only Mr. Goldberg returned from Koshki with his children. They had accepted the Soviet passports. Goldberg cried like a little child: "They handed us documents with the charges. Others had been already sentenced and shipped out. The trial is a sham! I was ready to go to prison but how can I leave the children with whom I just had been two months after such a long separation. They had lost their mother and now they would also lose me!"

Three days later Stefan and the boys returned from Melekess. Over there the situation did not look nearly as tragic as in our district. Mr. Dunin and many Poles had not even been approached about accepting Soviet passports. Mr. Kochanski accepted one, because he was sick and could not go to prison. The members of his family did the same because they would have lost their jobs if they had refused. That would have meant starvation, because Mr. Kochanski's family was very large. A few hours after returning from Melekess Stefan and the two other boys left for Kuibyshev. At that time no definite routine had as yet been established by the new administration of the Indom and the boys could move about freely. Nobody bothered either my uncle or me, although Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, visited us every day to inquire about my uncle's health. The events of the past several weeks, as well as my aunt's imprisonment, had weakened his health, so he spent long hours in bed while I sat at the window and watched the road. Each one of us had a knapsack ready with two changes of underwear and with some food in case the NKVD came to take us. We knew that Anna Pavlovna's inquiries about my uncle's health were not courtesy visits. She wanted to make certain that we did not escape. Nevertheless once she even brought a parcel with food for my imprisoned aunt.

On one windy and snowy March day my aunt returned home after spending a week in prison. She had gotten a ride from the new director of Indom whom she had met in Koshki. My aunt accepted a six-month Soviet passport. She could not take it being imprisoned. During that week she had fainted twice and the filth caused her face to break out in sores which her cellmates attempted to cure with nicotine removed from smoking pipes and by magic. At midnight on the day when the public prosecutor handed my aunt a document with various charges against her, she was called in by Altman. He started by saying: "Listen. In a few days you will be put on trial and shipped to a prison camp. My advice to you is to accept the passport and to return home. Life in a prison camp is not for you. See for yourself what you look like after a week in prison (at this point he handed her a mirror). Please try to understand that I am talking to you like a father and not like some NKVD official. I also have a child, a boy, and I have heard that you have a very pretty and bright daughter. Would you leave your child to her uncertain future? Of course, you can leave her with no worry whatsoever. The Soviet government will not permit her to perish. We will place her in an orphanage and bring her up in our spirit, the Bolshevik spirit, to be a good citizen of the Soviet Motherland." That was already too much for my aunt: Kathy getting a Bolshevik upbringing. Never! She accepted the Soviet passport. What the reason was that these presently issued passports were for six months and a few days later other certificates were issued for three months was anybody's guess. It is not improbable that at the bottom of it was the shortage of appropriate blanks.

A few days later Pani Bronka returned brokenhearted with a six-month Soviet passport whereas the other women from our village were given three-months certificates on the same day. It was clear that Altman took revenge on her as an Embassy staffer's wife. From Pani Bronka we learned about some of the events that had taken place in the Koshki prison. One evening after midnight the militiamen on duty took Kathy Duron and Mary, Henryk's girlfriend out of women's cell to the guard room. The remaining women started yelling. When the men in the cell next door found out what all the yelling was about, they started tearing at the door. There was such a racket in the building that the militiamen were afraid the men would break down the door. They quickly returned the two girls to the women's cell and ran into the men's cell. Since the leaders of the "mutiny" were Henryk and Father Wladyslaw, they were transferred to a "solitary."

The "solitary" was located in the basement of the Regional NKVD building. It was a small cell, too small even for one person, with a cement floor and with a small window without a window pane but "protected" from the outside by a barrel into which water from a waterspout dripped. Consequently, it was dark in the cell even during the day. Henryk and the priest were transferred to the "solitary" in the middle of the night. It was cold and the two could not even lay down on the floor because the cell was too short

to stretch out. The next morning the militiaman on duty brought a canteen with cold water. "As a punishment you will get no bread," he announced. The prospects of remaining in the "solitary" were hardly enticing. There wasn't even a parasha, the bucket for human waste. However, during the day the two prisoners made an important discovery. The door to the "solitary" did not close tightly and they noticed through the gap that although the door was closed by a bolt secured with a heavy padlock, the door jam was rotted so that the bolt could easily be removed and the prisoners could escape. Their escape plan had to be temporarily nixed when an older Russian was also placed in the cell with the obvious purpose of guarding the two Poles. However, at night when their "guardian angel" somehow arranged himself on the floor by "putting one fist under his head" (as the Russians put it so vividly) and started snoring, Henryk and Father Wladyslaw quietly leaned against the door. The doornails holding the bolt slipped out of the rotted doorjamb like out of butter. The two prisoners went out, closed the door behind them and pushed the doornails back into the door jam. The next morning when the "guardian angel" woke up he assumed that the two Poles had been sent with a transport to a prison camp.

When the militiaman on duty brought a canteen with cold water and 400 grams (close to a pound) of bread for each prisoner, he blasted the old man and raised the alarm. Immediately both of the villages in our district and also the villages in the districts on the way to Kuibyshev were notified by phone and given descriptions of the two escaped prisoners. Even several mounted militiamen were sent to the "Engels Collective Farm" where the priest lived and also along the road to Kuibyshev. The pursuit was fruitless. Henryk and Father Wladyslaw had simply vanished. I found out the details of that daring escape several weeks later from Henryk who came to Sergeyevka for a visit. Pani Bronka related only the fact that the two had escaped, that the militia "had egg all over their faces" and, consequently, speeded up the sentencing and shipping out process of the Poles. After pani Bronka's return our "pseudo family" was again complete except for Steve who was imprisoned in Koshki and against whom no charges had been filed as yet.

The day following Pani Bronka's return, David Goldberg came to our room and informed us about Maks' return from Kuibyshev. My aunt went to the Goldbergs' and brought back the information from Maks. The Embassy gave no definite instructions through him although it had information about the "passport giving campaign" even in the southern republics; i.e. Kazakhstan and Turkmenia. "Hold out!" was the Embassy's message to the Poles in the district. Maks became bored sitting at home and the following afternoon decided to come over and tell my uncle the details about his visit to the Embassy. He put on his overcoat which always used to make us joke that "it came from the royal palace in London." These dark navy blue coats with amaranth piping and with buttons bearing the royal cypher "G.R.V" had arrived in a transport of English clothing. We often wondered who could possibly have worn such overcoats in London. At any rate, Maks covered his face by raising the collar of the coat, put on a borrowed cap, bent his back and walked with a limp just to deceive the "eyes" that might have been watching him. He had not even spend ten minutes in our room, when Uncle Misha, collective farm's head foreman, came into the room and announced: "OK, Maks! Get ready. We are going to Koshki!" A few hours later Maks had increased the number of residents in the Koshki Investigative Prison (in Russian: *KPZ, Kamera Podozritel'novo Zaklucheniya*).

My turn came on March 30, 1943. We had expected Altman's visit to our village because several invalids, among them the hunchbacked Pani Justynka, three amputees, the blind husband of our former baker and Jozek with the injured arm, had refused to accept Soviet passports. The authorities were afraid to imprison them on account of their poor health. Before noon I noticed through our window a small sled drawn by a handsome black stallion with two men in elegant tulupy (long and heavy sheepskin coats) in it. "NKVD." I said to my uncle. "How do you know?" he asked. I said: "I am pretty sure. The horse, the sled and the 'tulupy' are definitely indicative of the NKVD." "Let's get ready," my uncle said to me and got up from his bed. Each of us prepared our underwear, a loaf of bread, a small jar of clarified butter and a pouch with tobacco. My suspicions proved correct when Mendelek came running in with the news that Altman was in the Indom and was using threats to have the young man with no legs accept a Soviet passport. The amputee had only one answer: "You can imprison me but I will not take your passport!" We found out later that the four amputees, who had to move out of the Indom and lived in some dilapidated cabin in the village, did not accept Soviet passports even though the new director promised to take them back to the Indom as soon as they accepted the Soviet passports.

Around 2:00 p.m the girl on duty at the telephone in the village mayor's office came to tell me that "Comrade Altman wants to see you." I put on my jacket and followed her. Jozek, with the injured arm was already waiting in the anteroom. Altman had taken over Anna Pavlovna's office and I could hear the conversation through the door. I recognized the voices of pani Mila, our former baker, and her blind husband who had just said: "I don't know." "As you wish" a voice answered calmly in Russian, and I surmised that it must have been Altman's. The voice continued: "You must understand that as soon as you accept a Soviet passport I will issue a travel pass for you to go to Odessa to Professor Filatov who is a world renown ophthalmologist and he will give you new eyes. However, I cannot issue a travel pass without a passport. When the war ends you will return to your Poland, you will work on your farm and you will be able to see. So what, are you going to do? Accept it or not?" A moment of silence. "I will accept the passport." said the blind man and then to his wife, "Mila sign for me." I could hear Altman saying to the NKVD man present in the office: "Comrade! Issue a five-year passport!" and entered the room where Jozek and I were waiting. Passing through that room he called Jozek's last name and went into the room which served as the *Selpo* office. Jozek followed him and closed the door behind the two of them. When Altman was passing by I only noticed his fur lined aviator boots but had no time to notice his features.

Through the closed door I could hear Altman's conversation with Jozek. "How about a passport?" he asked in Russian. "Citizen Commandant," Jozek answered in Polish. "I am an American citizen. I only lived in Poland but I was born in the United States and have a sister and a brother-in-law over there. I cannot accept a Soviet passport." The silence which followed made me realize that Altman had found himself in a touchy situation. "An American citizen." he said after a while in an unsure voice, "And do you have an American passport?" "No." was Jozek's answer. "Well," said Altman (probably with a silent sigh of relief), "I am giving you five days, that is until April 4, to contact the American Embassy in Kuibyshev, procure an American passport and show it to me in Koshki." The touchy situation was thus resolved very diplomatically. "Shrewed bastard." I thought about Altman, who knew full well that Jozek would not get an American passport in five days because he did not even have his sister's address and only remembered the name of the farm where he had been born. However, Jozek won a five-day "reprieve" and that meant a great deal because the political situation could change drastically and hopefully for the better even during that short a period of time.

When Jozek left the room happy and clutching a piece of paper in his good hand, I heard my name called and entered the office. Altman was sitting behind a desk. I judged him to be of medium height. He had blond hair which was swept upwards, Semitic features and blue nearsighted eyes behind thick glasses. He wore an army blouse with no insignia, navy blue jodhpur breeches and fur lined British aviator boots with zippers. "Sit down." he said. I did. Altman continued: "Undoubtedly you realize that I have called you in to suggest that you accept a Soviet passport. You are an intelligent individual with higher education, a medical student brought up in a physician's family, and I will not have to spend the time convincing you as I have to do with those compatriots of yours." I listened carefully as we sized each other up. When Altman finished I said that I understood everything perfectly, but that I was also certain that he realized that I had a Polish passport certifying my Polish citizenship and that one person could not have two citizenships. "That is correct." Altman answered, "And where do you have that Polish passport? I would like to see it." "At home." I answered. "Then go home and bring it." Altman said. I left the building thinking maybe that would save me.

My uncle and aunt waited impatiently at home. I told them about my conversation with Altman, took my Polish passport and went back to the mayor's office. On the steps I passed pani Mila with her blind husband. He reminded her to ask for the travel pass to Odessa to Prof. Filatov, and she just lashed at him: "You old fool! He is not going to give you any travel pass and you believed him and accepted a Bolshevik passport. He would not have done anything to you! A blind man is useless in a prison camp, but you just grabbed that passport! What kind of a Pole are you, anyway? And Pilsudski's Legionnaire to boot! Pfooi! Old blind ass hole!"

I entered the office and handed my passport to Altman. He examined it carefully and said: "I am sorry but this passport is invalid. It was issued in December 1936, so its validity expired in December 1938." I tried to explain to Altman that in Poland a passport was valid for the lifetime of its bearer unless he/she opted for another citizenship. No matter how hard I tried to explain this reality to him, the NKVD man was unmoved. He just placed my "invalid" passport in his briefcase and again started pleading:

"Please understand that if you accept a Soviet passport you will be able to move freely throughout the Soviet Union. You will be able to enroll in any university and finish your medical studies. When the war ends nobody will keep you here and you will be able to return to Poland. You will submit an application to the Presidium of the Supreme Council requesting a release from Soviet citizenship. In 72 hours you will get a positive answer and leave for Poland. I had a friend by the name of Fijalkowski, who got an answer to his application in 72 hours and went to Poland." I must have had a very doubting expression on my face because Altman said: "What is the point of my talking to you when you do not believe me anyway." "And do you believe me?" I retorted. "No," the NKVD man admitted. "So let's return to the business at hand namely the passport." "You know what?" I said to him. "What you said about the possibility of my continuing medical studies is worth considering. I will certainly have to think about it. Give me at least five days like you gave that invalid Jozek to think it over." This time, however, my ploy did not work. Altman refused and added: "I can tell you quite frankly that I should not have given Jozek that deadline, because he will not be able to secure an American passport in five days anyway. Either he will go to prison or he will accept our passport. But I cannot let you be free any longer without a Soviet passport. As it is, my superiors in Kuibyshev will be on my back because I neglected your case." "Well, I said." I am not accepting a Soviet passport."

On a piece of paper Altman wrote: "Citizen ... refused to accept a Soviet passport and, therefore, is subject to Article No ... of the Criminal Code." "Sign it," he said pushing the paper toward me. "It is a pity that you cannot let me have a few days to think the matter over." I said trying a stalling tactic. "I am sorry but I cannot," he answered. "Come to village mayor's office at 8 o'clock this evening and I will drive you to the prison in Koshki." I returned home, told my worried family about the result of my conversation with Altman and prepared my knapsack. I felt rather silly: arrested, but not incarcerated, neither a free man nor a prisoner. And then I got the bright idea to gamble on my nearsightedness. I shared that idea with my uncle and reported to Altman in the mayor's office before dusk. "Citizen Commandant," I said. "I am very nearsighted, 8 diopters and astigmatism. In the dark I can see absolutely nothing. If you put me in the sled with you then I will be fine. I cannot walk behind it, because I will not see a thing. What if I stumble in the dark, fall down and lose my eye glasses. Then I will be of no use in a prison camp." This ploy bore fruit. Altman was understanding when it came to eyesight because he himself was nearsighted. However, he could not take me into the sled since there were already two passengers: he and the militiaman from Koshki. Furthermore, the road had thawed and was muddy because it had warmed up overnight and during the day. "Well, in this case" Altman said. "report to the prison in Koshki at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning. Sign an obligation to that effect which the militiaman will write out." The militiaman wrote on a piece of paper: "I, Citizen ... whose signature appears at the bottom of this obligation will report to the prison of the Regional Militia Headquarters in Koshki." I signed the obligation and returned home in high spirits. Another night spent on the floor in our room! Incomparably better than a night spent on the floor of a cell in the Koshki prison.

My situation was both unusual and funny. I was to report to the prison voluntarily (figuratively speaking)! Altman knew full well that I would not run away, because there was no place to which one could escape. In every village and along every road people were on the lookout for escaping Poles. Escape into the forest? The forest was 16 km (10 miles) from our village in the opposite direction of Kuibyshev, but one could not move into a forest at the end of March when one did not have some prepared shelter. Getting to Salavan was no better than being in the Koshki district. Although Salavan belonged to the Ulyanovsk province, Poles were also pursued there. My status as a "free prisoner" was unthinkable in any other country except the Soviet Union.

That evening Izaak Sznycer came to visit from Petrovka and brought us information about the former Trustee of the Embassy, Michael. In Aunt Tosya's house in Koshki he had stashed 3 cases containing 180 bars of soap for distribution to the Polish population. Because of the commotion caused by the "passport giving campaign" nobody remembered this soap. Michael, taking advantage of the situation, arrived one day with his mistress, the physician's assistant, and transferred the cases of soap to her cabin. Shortly thereafter, some Poles from Petrovka saw him selling bars of English soap in the Salavan market place. Nobody talked with him, and he avoided the Poles. We spent the evening talking about various things. Izaak slept next to me on the floor and decided to join my uncle in accompanying me to Koshki.

The next morning we got up earlier than usual. The weather was atrocious. A warm wind blew from the east and a wet snow was coming down. After breakfast I sewed 1000 rubles into my pants. After bidding farewell to my aunt and Kathy the three of us left. It was 9:30 in the morning; no way would I make it to the prison by 11 o'clock. My uncle was not perturbed and told me that I should not worry on this account. They will just put me in a cell a little bit later. "Besides," he added, "As long as Russia has existed nobody went to prison voluntarily." The walk was very tiring. Wet snow stuck to our shoes and made them twice as heavy. During the first half of the trip the wind mixed with wet snow blew from the left side. During the second half of the trip it blew straight in our faces, because the road turned 90 degrees. Our trousers and underwear were completely soaked, and we could feel the water trickle down our socks and into our shoes.

Before one o'clock in the afternoon we arrived wet and tired at Aunt Tosya's. We undressed and I placed my socks and pants in the Russian oven for them to dry. After a half an hour my clothes were sufficiently dry so that I could put them on. I said goodbye to my uncle, Izaak Sznycer and Aunt Tosya, and went across the market place toward the prison in the District Militia Headquarters. It had stopped snowing, but a warm spring wind continued to blow and piles of horse manure, old straw and hay, which had remained from the winter bazaars, began to show from under the melting snow. An enamel cup and a wooden spoon, the two most important items in a prisoner's life, were rattling in my knapsack. I walked with the proud feeling of doing my duty as a Pole who when faced with the choice of being imprisoned or accepting a Soviet passport, chose the former.

Three weeks later and several thousand miles west of Koshki, in Warsaw, the Jews rose against their German oppressors. Ever since the imposition of the first restrictions against Polish Jews by the Germans in 1940 until the final liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, the Polish nation as a whole was not willing to fulfill its duty toward its citizens of Jewish faith. Even the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising did not jolt the people into any type of concerted action because to the majority of them it seemed much more important that "Hitler at least freed us from the Jews."

Imprisonment

As I approached the prison I noticed the faces of the imprisoned Poles in the windows of the basement cells: women in one, men in the other one. Someone shouted my name. I turned looking for a familiar face. Behind the barred window of the men's cell I noticed the faces of Maks and Steve. "Where are you going?" they called out simultaneously. "To join you." I answered and stopped to chat with them but a young lad, walking in front of the cell windows and not even a militiaman, yelled threateningly: "Get away or I will shoot!" which prompted laughing and jeers from the cell. I went in the direction of the guard room hoping that I would be put in the Maks' and Steve's cell.

The guard room was full of people both Russians and Poles who waited for Altman's permission to give food to the prisoners. Usually the people were kept waiting until the evening and then the authorities refused to accept the food parcels in an attempt to force the prisoners through starvation to accept a Soviet passport. I approached the militiaman on duty and said: "Commandant Altman ordered me to report here." I gave him my name. "We know, we know." The militiaman answered. "Undress for a personal search. What is in the knapsack?" As I was taking off my jacket and my shirt, the militiaman was inspecting the contents of my knapsack. He cut up the loaf of bread with a filthy knife looking for letters. He cut up the the bar of soap with the same knife and for the same reason. Then using the same knife started digging in the jar with butter. He stuck his paw into the tocacco pouch, removed two handfuls of tobacco which he placed in the drawer "to taste later." On the bottom of the tobacco pouch I had hidden my "good luck charm," the army button with a Polish eagle, which the searcher did not find. After finishing with the knapsack, the militiaman turned his attention to me. He turned all of my pockets inside out. Carefully felt every fold, every "suspiciously" thick part of the clothing and as well as the lapels and... felt the sewn in money. "What is it?" He asked and even before I could answer he had cut the pants with his knife and pulled out the wad of cash. "Why did you sew it in?" He asked. "So that your prisoners would not steal it!" I answered. "You are a sly one. Follow me!" He remarked. I took my knapsack and followed him. Alas, he did not put me in the basement cell with Maks and Steve but in the one next to the guard room. Obviously Altman did not want the three of us to decide on a common course of action.

The militiaman on duty removed the padlock, opened the cell door and let me in. "OK, boys!" he said to the Russian felons in the cell on his way out. "Search this new one. He brought a lot of dough with him!" One of the Russians, who turned out to be their leader, got up and reached for my knapsack but one of the Poles immediately jumped up at him with fists on the ready. "Do you want to get it again as you did last time?" he asked with a threat in his voice. "Don't you dare touch him, you s.o.b.! He is one of ours!" I moved inside the cell and started shaking hands with my cell mates. It turned out that I knew only four people although all all of them knew me.

The cell in which I found myself was very small and there were at least twice as many prisoners in it as there should have been. Along one wall, the one bordering on the women's cell, was a wide wooden shelf about 3 feet above the floor on which the prisoners could sleep. Between that shelf and the opposite wall was a three-foot wide space for walking. There was about 5 feet between the end of the shelf and the cell door. In the corner and next to the door stood a *parasha* for human excrement, a wooden bucket with two handles. In the door there was a small closed opening, a "judas window," called volchok in Russian, which could be opened from the outside. In the wall across from the cell door was a barred 8 x 16 inch opening which faced the prison yard with a wooden privy. Because the days were warm the privy contents had thawed, the stink wafting into the male and female cells was horrendous.

Part of the plank bed/shelf closer to the door was occupied by the Russians: four young boys aged 16-19 years, one war invalid and one older man about 50 years of age. The remainder of the shelf was occupied by Polish Gypsies. The walkway between the wooden shelf and the wall was "appropriated" by the old gardner who used to come to the Home for Polish Invalids and who had warned us about Mr. Kolanko being an NKVD agent, by a blacksmith from the "Karl Marx Collective Farm," who had always been grateful for the clothes provided to him by the Polish Embassy, by Mr. Malinski from Petrovka, a friend of the Sznycers and a candidate for the Embassy's Trusteeship in place of Michael, and by Mr. Rafal, who had roomed with Father Wladyslaw. My cell mates were very happy that I had been placed in their cell and immediately informed the women in neighboring cell by knocking on the wall between the two cells and shouting through a small opening under the wooden shelf. Among the women were a few

from Sergeyevka who were eager to hear any news from the village. I told them what I knew but to all of their questions about what to do I could offer only one answer: "The Embassy says to hold out." which meant not to accept the Soviet passports.

At 3 p.m. the guard on duty opened the cell door, placed a bucket half full with soup in the cell and left locking the door behind him. The oldest Russian prisoner, Zotov, who was the "elder of the cell" (*starshina kameri* in Russian) announced: "Come over!" and every prisoner approached him carrying some container. Standing at the bucket Zotov constantly mixed the soup with a wooden spoon while in his left hand he held a quarter-liter cup with which he scooped up the soup and poured into the prisoner's container. The soup was mostly water with some groats, a few pieces of carrot and a few cabbage leaves floating in it. The constant mixing was necessary in order to assure that each prisoner received an equal amount of the "solids." The soup had no taste, not a drop of fat and smelled like dishwater. "Probably your first *balanda* ("prison soup" in Russian prisoner language). You will get tired of it and won't survive long on it." Zotov remarked pouring a portion into my container. One of the Poles whispered in my ear to give the Russians part of my bread and even some butter because, according to the unwritten prison law, food from received parcels, etc. should be divided among all cell mates. I took a few pieces of bread, scooped some butter with a wooden spatula borrowed from Mr. Malinowski and placed the "goodies" in the middle of the Russian group on the wooden shelf saying: "Here, comrades, soup does not go without bread. As long as there is any, there will be enough for all! The prisoners thanked me and from that time on their attitude toward me was impeccable, although I never stopped hoping they would be sent away very soon. The Gypsies gave part of their *balanda* to the Russian prisoners and lived on their supplies of bread, rolls, meat, fowl and milk. I could not understand how they could have had such supplies of food when no parcels for the prisoners were being accepted. Everything became clear to me later that evening.

It started getting dark outside and with the approaching evening the activities of the NKVD increased. This branch of the Soviet system works only from the evening until dawn and never during daytime. A stranger in any Soviet city or town could always find the NKVD headquarters after dark, because it is the only building lit up at night. Every few minutes the guard on duty noisily opened the cell door and took out someone from our cell. The Gypsies were taken to face Altman who yelled at them, threatened them and cajoled to accept Soviet passports. The Russians were taken before the Militia Commandant investigating their crimes. It seems that they had burglarized a number of Selpo stores and a Raipotrebsoyuz base stealing several thousand rubles worth of goods. The gang's leader was Yurka, an 18-year old homeless youth, who was a notorious thief and a resident of homes for delinquent children, prisons and prison camps, probably from the time he was born. Yurka was a strong heavy set fellow with Tatar features and a shaved head. When the guard on duty called someone from the neighboring cell, a sign that the NKVD had begun to function, Yurka announced to his "boys: "If anyone of you squeals, I will find him and kill him!" Zotov and the war invalid, Zhenya, did not belong to Yurka's gang. Zotov used to be a manager of a tannery and was accused of some illegal schemes involving leather. Zhenya was accused of selling the collective farm's bread. In connection with the same crime a hunchbacked accountant of that collective farm had been arrested and placed in our cell that evening. In the meantime, the members of Yurka's gang were being led out and subjected to "shuffling;" i.e. some of them were being kept in the guard room, others remained in our cell, while some were moved to the men's cell in the basement. They were shuffled around to those three places so that they could not confer with one another and decide on a mutual course of action.

The only light in our cell was from a migushka, a kerosene lamp without the glass chimney. We stretched out in our corresponding places but the constant opening and closing of cell doors made sleep impossible. Those of us on the floor had our legs under the wooden shelf and the upper part of our bodies in the walk space. The Gypsies sat or stretched out on their part of the shelf and sang. Their repertoire consisted of the last prewar Polish popular songs and some Russian ones. One of them accompanied the singers on a harmonica. The Gypsies told me that they had participated in the last film produced in prewar Poland. They sang in soft voices because the militiamen prohibited any "noise and singing as being against the law." From the neighboring women's cell we could hear the sounds of the evening prayer and the muffled singing of the old Polish hymn *Boze cos Polske*. Those evening and morning prayers drove the militiamen out of their minds but there was nothing they could do about it. The stink from the *parasha*, the excrement bucket, was horrendous.

Late that evening a soft whistle sounded under the window of our cell. A few Gypsies jumped to the window and started whispering in their language to their women outside. Then the Gypsy women began pushing pieces of bread, meat, etc. between the bars of the window. Thus the mystery of the Gypsies' food supply was solved, because the visits of their women took place regularly every evening. It was well after midnight when I fell asleep.

Suddenly I woke up because someone was tugging at my shoulder. I put on my eye glasses and saw Yurka pointing to the cell door. In the "judas" opening I noticed a part of Maks' face. Immediately I went to the door and we greeted each other. Needless to say his unexpected visit surprised me until Maks explained what had happened. It turned out that almost two hours earlier Altman had called him in, accused him of distributing illegal publications and as a proof showed Maks a Russian book with the tsar's eagle published in 1898, supposedly found among the literature brought from the Embassy for distribution in our district. Consequently, Altman had decided to charge Maks with antistate activity under Article 58 which carried a 10-year prison sentence. Unless, of course, Maks would accept a Soviet passport and then the matter would be hushed up. For almost two hours Altman tried to have Maks confess and finally sent him to the guard room "to think it over" and come up with a decision. The guard room was empty except for the militiaman on duty whose name was Koftin. He quite frequently and in subtle ways demonstrated his sympathy toward the Poles. I remember my aunt telling us that after having been searched by a militiawoman named Luba and a militiaman named Orlov, she noticed that her wedding band was missing. When my aunt faced Altman she told him about the theft. He got furious, called in Koftin, who was on duty at that time and lashed at him: "You s.o.b! Immediately find that wedding band! Otherwise I personally will take care of you!" When my aunt returned to the cell, Koftin came up to her and started swearing that he had not taken the band but would gladly pay for it, etc. Now my aunt, in turn, demanded to see Altman and explained to him that not Koftin but Luba and Orlov searched her. Of course, the wedding band was never found but afterwards Koftin told my aunt: "Whenever you are in Koshki, you can stay with us. We have a cow and I told my wife about you." Because of his attitude toward the Poles, Koftin had fallen into disfavor with his commandant and remained just an ordinary militiaman although he was eligible for promotion.

When Altman sent Maks to the guard room, Koftin was on duty, and Maks breathed easier. He gave Maks tobacco for a cigarette and even permitted him to talk with me, which explained how Maks happened to be at my cell door. "What should I do?" he asked. I suggested: "Go to Altman and tell him point blank that he, Altman, is using blackmail, because you did not bring that book from the Embassy, and you do not know anything about it. Furthermore, even the cheapest and dirtiest blackmail will not force you to accept a Soviet passport." I gave Maks half of my tobacco to share with Steve, and he left. I went back to my place and fell asleep. Needless to say we slept totally dressed.

We woke up because of the cold that penetrated our bodies. It was dawn outside. Nobody thought about washing. There wasn't even any water. We just sat, yawning and scratching. Although I had been in the cell less than 24 hours, just like my cell mates I was already covered with lice. It was the beginning of a typical day in a Soviet prison. At 6 o'clock the guard on duty opened the cell door and announced: "A walk! Take the *parasha*! Zotov ordered me and the hunchbacked accountant to take the bucket adding as if to justify selecting us: "You are novices and have to get used to it." The *parasha* was very heavy and the poor hunchback bent almost in half under its weight. The two of us left first followed by our cell mates walking in a single file line through the guard room, the hallway and out into the yard. The morning frost let up and there was mud all over the yard. Employing some highly unusual and even fancy acrobatics so as to have only our shoes covered with mud and not to have it almost up to our knees, the hunchback and I reached the privy and emptied the waste bucket. After putting the *parasha* aside we joined the others walking single file around the yard under the watchful eyes of three militiamen with riffles or revolvers "on the ready." One by one we left the file to go to relieve ourselves.

In the meantime the bored guards were looking for some entertainment. They picked out two of the youngest Gypsies and ordered them to dance. "*Mora! Dance!*" That is the way I found out that "*mora*" is the word for bread in the Gypsy language. Obviously the Gypsies must have at one time or another asked for bread and the word "*mora*" stuck to them. The Gypsies who remained in the line of the exercising prisoners started singing and the two boys danced. "Great! Great!" admired the guards. The women also watched the show from their cell even though the privy had no doors. After a short time the roles would

change. They would be in the yard exercising and in the doorless privy and we would be back in our cell looking through our cell's window. Zotov, *starshina kameri*, and another Russian did not go out to exercise but remained behind "to clean the cell." Actually they were checking the contents of our belongings, stealing the more valuable items which they later shared with the militiamen. They did not steal anything from the Gypsies, because after the first theft the Gypsies beat them up and recovered their goods. There was nothing to steal from the remaining Poles or from me. Besides I had treated them well upon my arrival in the cell. This time the victim was the hunchback who was cleaned out mercilessly. When all of the prisoners had relieved themselves in the privy and the Gypsies tired of dancing, we returned to our cell in the same order; *i.e.* with the *parasha* leading the file of prisoners.

Subsequently the prisoners from the other cells were let out to exercise. This lasted approximately until 8 o'clock when the guard shift changed. The new guards came into each cell, counted the prisoners, made some stupid remarks and left. After a while, sometimes earlier and at other times later, the distribution of bread took place. The guard on duty slipped through the "judas" 450 grams (one pound) of wet, sour black bread for each prisoner. Some consumed the whole portion right away. When I finished the bread I had brought with me, I used to divide my 450 gram daily portion of prison bread into three parts; *i.e.* for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This always elicited admiration from my cell mates and particularly from Steve and Maks with whom I got to share a cell later on. Around noon the militia commandant visited each cell asking if we had any wishes and if we were happy. Nobody had any wishes and everybody was happy! After several hours one prisoner was called from each cell and the group, escorted by a militiaman with the rifle on the ready, went with buckets to the Raipotrebsoyuz mess hall for soup. And thus another day in the life of a prisoner in the Koshki prison passed by.

Two days later the investigation against Yurka and his gang was completed. One of his cohorts had squealed. It turned out that the master mind of the gang was Yurka and that he could expect the heaviest sentence. "As soon as I get out of prison I will kill that s.o.b.!" he announced in the cell. Several Poles and Gypsies were also tried, sentenced to two years in prison camps and were now waiting to be transported to their destination. The Russians comforted themselves by claiming that the life in the camps was better than the life in the prisons, not because the food was better in the camps, but because one worked outside, and the barracks were less crowded than the prison cells. In other words, relatively speaking "paradise on earth!"

On the third day at noon the guard on duty went into each of the cells and announced: "All of those whose investigation has been completed or those who have received sentences, get ready for the transport. In the evening you will be escorted to the train station." The prisoners who fell into those categories began putting their belongings together. The Russians from Yurka's gang were to be shipped to a prison in Melekess where they were to await their trial. At dusk the prisoners destined for the transport were led out of their cells. Only five persons remained in our cell: Zotov, Zhenka, the hunchback, pan Rafal and I. We parted warmly with our cell mates who were led out. We watched through the window as the prisoners were arranged in a column, four abreast, in mud up to their ankles in the pouring rain. Two militiamen with revolvers in their hands placed themselves in front of the column and two placed themselves in back. In charge of the column was a NCO on horseback. He unholstered a revolver, released the safety latch and pronounced the standard phrase: "A step to the left or a step to the right will be considered an escape attempt, and we will shoot!" The gate was open and the column left the yard.

The militiaman Koftin, again on night guard duty, brought the *migushka*, a kerosene lamp without a chimney, into the cell and remarked: "I guess you'll miss them." Then he turned to pan Rafal and me saying: "What about the two of you? How long will you sit here and stick it out?" And shaking his head added pensively: "Eh, boys, boys! Accept those passports and go home." At midnight we woke up to the noise of many voices and the racket of cell doors being opened and closed. The convoy had returned from the train station. *Stolypinka*, the prison car which derived its nickname from the name of one of the last tsar's prime ministers, was full and could not accept our group. The prisoners returned drenched and chilled to the bone. Since they had no way to dry their clothes, they just stretched out in their wet wraps and went to sleep.

The next day was Sunday, market day in Koshki and a day of extraordinary activity in the prison. The militiamen combed the market place from the early morning catching peasants who were selling

makhorka, home grown tobacco. Because the district had not fulfilled its "tobacco part" of the taxes, the peasants were prohibited from selling tobacco on the open market. The militiamen brought the arrested farmers to the guard room, took away their *makhorka* and let them go a few hours after the market was over. The seized tobacco did not end up in a government warehouse, however, but in the pockets of the militiamen.

Some time during that day the guard on duty opened the door to our cell and pushed in a sobbing 12-year old boy, who tripped over the threshold and stretched out on the floor. "Teach him a lesson so he will not steal in the future." the guard said to Yurka and closed the cell door but looked inside the cell through the "judas." Slowly Yurka got up from the wooden shelf-bed, approached the stretched out boy and kicked him. "So, you decided to steal!" he yelled menacingly. With his left hand he lifted up the boy by the collar of his jacket and with his right hand slapped the boy's face twice. "Don't hit, Uncle! The boy pleaded. "I did not steal." "Well, don't lie." Yurka muttered and put the boy back on the floor. The guard moved away from the "judas" and an unpleasant quiet descended on the cell interrupted only by the muffled sobs of the boy. Finally the boy calmed down. Obviously it was not the first time he experienced such an adventure. He related how someone had stolen a purse with several hundred rubles from an old woman in the market place. The woman started to yell and pointed out the boy and his friend who were caught by some passersby. "Well," Yurka said knowingly. "You will draw a few years and not only will you not have any desire to steal anymore but you will also not even have any desire to go to a market place." The boy started sobbing again. The guard on duty, who had just placed a bucket with soup in the cell, asked: "What, punk, are you still howling?!" and kicked him twice. After the meal the boy calmed down and Yurka, who was stretched out on the shelf-bed, started singing Russian prison songs. I deduced from his rich repertoire that Yurka must have spent most of his life on "state subsistence." One of the young Gypsies started exercising himself in the small space between the shelf-bed, the cell door and the waste bucket. He hummed a tune and walked to its tact: two steps forward, turn about and two steps in the opposite direction because there was no room for any more.

During my several days of sharing the cell with the Gypsies I was able to make some interesting observations. One of them was those "two-step walks" which I attributed to the Gypsies' unbounded energy which, under normal circumstances, they expended through dancing. All of the Gypsy men and women were completely illiterate. Not only didn't they know how to read and write but they did not even know how to hold a pencil. "We don't need it." the old Gypsy, Kowalski, told me. "We are always on the move. We just cannot stay in any one place too long." Another characteristic of the Gypsies was that they formed a group and shared everything equally in the group. Although they were on excellent terms with us, their Polish cell mates, they never even suggested that we join them at a meal and never gave us anything to eat. Their women used to bring food every evening and sneak it through the barred window inside the cell in spite of the militiamen's attempts to chase them away or to catch them. Two or three times the guards had been successful but the men in the cell demanded to see their women and protested so noisily that the militiamen let the Gypsy women go.

All day long we could hear from our cell how the guard on duty phoned the station master at the Pogruznyaya train station regarding the *stolypinka*, the prison car. After a while it was announced in all of the cells that the transport would leave that evening. This time our cell mates' leave-taking was for good. They did not return that night. Pan Rafal and I mused about what the next day would bring. Would we be presented with charges against us or not? Where could Father Wladyslaw and Henryk be? We knew that they had not been captured because the militiamen had phoned and alerted various counties about their escape. That evening we sat with Zotov, Zhenka and the hunchback, and I told them about Poland, about Warsaw and about my medical studies. What interested them most and seemed totally incomprehensible to them was our decision to be imprisoned rather than to accept Soviet passports. "Isn't it all the same no matter what passport?" Zotov remarked. "If they would give me now an American passport, I would not refuse it." "Yes," I said smiling. "I also wouldn't think twice and accept it." "You see." Zhenka clinched the discussion. "A passport is the same anywhere." We went to sleep.

The next day was Monday, April 5, 1943. The morning did not forecast anything unusual, just a nice sunny day, however, in the afternoon strange things began to happen which provided topics of conversation for the whole night. From the adjoining cell one of the women from Petrovka was called to Altman. After an hour the guard on duty led pan Rafal's wife out of the same cell. Pan Rafal became

awfully agitated and upset but after some time he was also called in to Altman's office. In both cells the inmates waited with trepidation for the return of the two women and pan Rafal. In the meantime I climbed under the shelf-bed and talked with the women in the next cell. Yurka had dug such a big hole in the wall in order to flirt with the Russian women-prisoners that now one could even squeeze through it from one cell to the other. The militiamen pretended not to notice that hole and when the women were taken out for their "exercise," Yurka used to squeeze through it into women's cell and burglarize it. As I have already indicated robbing the prisoners served two purposes: it was to force Poles to accept the Soviet passports and at the same time enrich Yurka and the militiamen. But now Yurka was in the Melekess prison and I took up the position at the hole. I had to watch, however, that the guard on duty did not catch me talking with people in the adjoining cell. As long as Yurka had made use of the hole it had not been "noticed" but now with him gone it was an entirely different situation.

The women and I were considering whether or not the three people called in front of Altman would accept Soviet passports. Zotov, who began to catch the significance of individual Polish words and who had climbed next to the hole with me, thought they would. Suddenly we heard the voices of the two returning women and pan Rafal in the guard room. Both Zotov and I got out from under the shelf-bed in a hurry. The guard on duty let pan Rafal back into our cell, then let the two women back into their cell and waited until they had collected their belongings. The rest of the women were totally disoriented. "Did you accept?" they asked. The two women answered in the negative. "So where are you going?" They were asked. "To our children. Don't ask any more. Rafal will tell you everything." They said. When they left and the guard had locked the cell door, pan Rafal and I slipped next to the hole in the wall where he reported what had happened.

When the woman from Petrovka had faced Altman, he again began to coerce her into accepting a Soviet passport. When he met with refusal on her part, Altman had pan Rafal's wife brought in and tried to work on both women. They categorically rejected his attempts at which point Altman ordered pan Rafal to be brought in in order for him to persuade his wife to accept a Soviet passport. However, pan Rafal told Altman that he could not expect his wife to do something that he opposed. At this point Altman turned to the two women saying: "I am surprised that the two of you, mothers after all, left your little boys under the care of strangers. That is a crime! Immediately get your belongings and go to the children!" The two women just stood there dumbfounded. When it finally dawned on them that they were being set free, the one from Petrovka said: "You are just letting us go without anything? Return our documents!" But Altman called in the guard on duty and yelled at the women to get out of his sight immediately or he would send them back to their cell. That evening until very late we discussed the case of the two women and concluded that the political situation must have improved and there was hope that we would be let go.

It must have been well after midnight when a militiaman woke us up, ordered to collect our belongings and step out of the cell. We were too sleepy to think about the reason for this night alarm. Transport? Solitary? Appearance before Altman? Or a search of the cell to find a pocket knife or a belt one was prohibited from having. We did not have to wait long for an answer. We, as well as the women-prisoners, were being transferred to cells in the basement because the upper ones were being repaired. Thus I found myself in the same cell with Steve, Maks, several boys from the "Engels Collective Farm" and a few boys from Petrovka. One could not imagine how happy the three of us were to be together. We could not talk long because our cell mates wanted to sleep. Nevertheless, we managed to speak briefly and I found out that for some time nobody had been called to Altman or presented with any charges. It seemed like a temporary calm before some important events. Would they be good or bad? Nobody even wanted to venture a guess.

The next day was a typical spring day. It was pleasantly warm and the sun shone through the window straight into our cell. The street was full of puddles. Maks stood on the shelf-bed and looked outside. Suddenly he yelled: "Come here! Look who is passing by!" In a split second we were at the window. Michael, the former Trustee, walked down the street. He walked slowly, carefully choosing the drier spots and oblivious to the "ovation" which he was about to encounter. "Traitor!" shouted one of the boys. "Traitor!" yelled all of the others. The shouting brought the women to the window of their cell and they just as noisily supported us calling Michael all kinds of names. The former Trustee of the Embassy of the Polish Republic just lifted the collar of his English overcoat and ignored the puddles as he rapidly continued on his way in an obvious attempt to escape the taunting. When the militiamen arrived to see

what all that noise was about, we were sitting on the shelf-bed as if nothing had happened. Nevertheless, a young boy with a rifle, "a militia apprentice" as we referred to those boys, was posted outside our window. Those boys were too young to be drafted into the army but were called to Koshki by the district military authorities for this sort of guard duty.

Maks continued to stand at the window, now joined by one of the boys from Petrovka and the two of them tried to engage the young armed guard in a conversation. Since the latter wanted a smoke, Maks gave him enough tobacco for a cigarette. The ice was broken! Although the guard did not seem friendly, he did not seem outrightly hostile either and that in itself was important. Consequently, the boy from Petrovka, Slawek, started entertaining the guard in a rather macabre manner. Slawek had scurvy while he was in the prison camps and the condition recurred during his present confinement. As a result, he was able to take out two or three teeth easily and subsequently return them to their sockets. The young guard was obviously fascinated by this "performance" and undoubtedly somewhat horror stricken. As the guard's attention was concentrated on Slawek's teeth, Maks noticed Roza Goldberg and Roza Kalman walking toward the prison. He called to them and the guard "discreetly" marched to the end of the building, and hid behind the corner. The girls brought food for the three of us but now were afraid to climb the fence, cross the lawn and push the food through the window because the guard stood behind the corner. Despite Maks' assurances that "he is our boy" and "don't be chicken, the rifle has no bolt," the girls were afraid and Roza Kalman decided to use her influence as a member of the Young Communist League with a girlfriend, a militiawoman and also a member of the Young Communist League. Unfortunately, Roza's friend was off duty but the militiaman on duty was the Pole hater, Orlov. Consequently, the two girls decided to go to the "Home of the Collective Farmer," the local inn, hoping that maybe Koftin would be on duty in the evening and they would be able to influence the good-hearted Koftin and Roza Kalman's girlfriend to pass the food to us.

Needless to say we were quite upset that the girls were afraid to approach the cell window because for the past several days we had lived on the 450 gram (one pound) bread ration and the balanda, the prison soup, served once a day. Since our imprisonment we had not washed, our unshaven faces were covered with thick bristle, and the lice were so vicious that we scratched ourselves all the time. At least my cell mates had shorn heads because two days before my arrival in the cell a barber had plied his trade on their heads. Since my hair was badly overgrown I asked the guard on duty to have a barber brought in but to no avail.

When the evening approached the three of us became very anxious. Would the girls be able to hand us the food parcel or not? Maks was furious and bitched about the helplessness of women in general and about Roza Goldberg's stupidity in particular although all of us knew that she was far from being stupid. In vain Maks and Steve stood at the window peering into the darkness outside and listening for their approaching steps. When it started to rain the two gave up their watch muttering in disgust: "Now those two ass holes won't come for sure because, God forbid, they will get soaked and will dissolve as if they were made out of sugar!" It was silent in the cell. Some of the prisoners slept while the rest just sat looking dejected. It was difficult to live on 450 grams of bread the consistency of wet clay and on watery soup. We were covered with scabs from the dirt and to top it off, nothing was being sent from home. Zotov and Zhenka received homemade meals twice a day and no wonder; both were from Koshki and known to the militiamen. The hunchback still had supplies from home. At this point, we had neither the food we had brought with us nor any tobacco left.

Suddenly we heard a whisper outside of the cell window which was now covered with a hanging piece of sack so it would not rain on the shelf-bed: "Maks! Maks!" Maks jumped up like an uncoiled spring and, in what seemed like a fraction of a second, was at the window. Under the window stood Jozek, the boy with the injured arm, "The American," as we called him now. He pushed through the window hunks of bread, three tins with rendered butter, tobacco, old newspapers, etc. We were saved! When Jozek transferred the contents of his sack to us, we asked him how he happened to show up, etc. It turned out that he had decided to satisfy his curiosity and come to Koshki in order to see what had happened to us. In the "Home of the Collective Farmer" he had chanced upon the two girls who were terribly upset about their failure that afternoon. Consequently, Jozek decided to try his luck in getting the food to us. After all he was an experienced ex-prisoner and we had to admit that he accomplished the task of delivering the food to us very professionally.

The next day it rained until noon. Our situation remained unchanged. Nobody was officially charged with anything, nobody was called in to face Altman, nobody was shipped out, and nobody was let go. Only the hunchback and Zhenka were called for interrogation every night. After we finished our soup the militiaman on duty came into the cell and announced: "Get dressed! You are going to disinfection!" We got dressed and were led into the yard where the mud was up to our ankles and were arranged in a column, four prisoners abreast. A militiaman with a loaded revolver in his hand placed himself at the head of the column. Orlov unholstered his revolver and loaded it. "No talking!" he shouted menacingly. "A step to the left or a step to the right will be considered an escape attempt, and we will shoot to kill!" Orlov placed himself at the rear of the column. The gate was opened and the column moved out slowly into the street, the prisoners pulling their feet out of the thick mud with difficulty. Outside a third militiaman, this one on horseback joined our column.

We were led toward the Koshki Hospital located in a distant part of the town. The streets and the road were covered with thick almost semisolid mud. People stumbled and slipped in it, and Orlov shouted: "March straight or I will shoot!" brandishing his revolver. Upon reaching the hospital we were led into a waiting room and placed in one corner while the patients were chased away from us and shoved into the opposite corner. Then we were taken into a small neighboring room in groups of three, told to undress and one of the "militia apprentices" carried our clothing on a long metal rod to the disinfection chamber. It took fifty minutes for our clothes to "roast" in there and during that time we were naked and freezing. It was so beastly cold that one did not know what to do in order to warm up. Jumping up and down or flapping ones arms and legs made the air move and only increased the cold. Finally we squatted on the floor so as to expose the smallest surface of our bodies to the cold. We put our scalding and still wet clothes on with pleasure, and returned to the waiting room to make room for the next group. By the time the last group was disinfected, it was dark. Now Koftin led the column while the militiaman on horseback followed behind. Walking in the darkness through the mud was a nightmare. In Koshki the horse slipped and its rider fell into the mud. Swearing loudly, the militiaman decided to lead the horse by his bridle. Koftin decided to take a short-cut to the prison and led us across the market place. For a long time we walked between booths and stands following Koftin. "You know what?" Maks whispered to me. "Koftin is purposely leading us this way so that someone will 'split' and then we will all be punished." Upon our return to prison we were counted but nobody had "split."

The End of Imprisonment

The next day passed uneventfully. On Friday, April 9, 1943, Zotov wanted a shave and started pestering Maks about it from the early morning. The time before noon was bad for this activity because the cell door was frequently opened either for inspection by the commandant, for prisoner counting or for bread distribution. When we finished the daily soup, Maks got down to work. He took a razor blade from Zhenka and started sharpening it using my enameled mug. After rubbing the blade against the inside of the mug for ten minutes, Maks decided that it was sharp and started making a handle for it. He took a pen knife from pan Rafal, who had hidden the implement in his tobacco pouch, split off a piece of board from the shelf-bed and whittled it into a thin stick which he folded in half without breaking it. Then Maks placed the blade between the two arms of the folded stick and tied the arms with a thread. The razor was ready for the victim.

Zotov had just managed to wet half of his face when we heard the clink of the key in the cell door padlock. Maks pushed his razor between the boards of the shelf-bed and it fell to the floor. The militiaman on duty opened the women's cell, called the name of one of the old women and took her to Altman. We felt uneasy. Since he had started calling people again it could only mean that now we would be handed the charges against us, then be tried and transported out of the Koshki prison. Maks climbed under the shelf-bed to retrieve his razor. We all waited with baited breath. The old woman did not return to her cell. Zotov again wetted half of his face put some soap on it and rubbed the soap with his fingers. Again we heard the door to the women's cell open, then we heard steps of a single person in the hall. Steve climbed under the shelf-bed and through the hole in the wall between the two cells asked: "What is going on?" "Altman called out another old woman." was the answer. Steve got out. What was the meaning of it all? "Take passports, boys!" Zotov teased us. "Cut it out." Maks said. "Or I will slit your throat accidentally while shaving you!" Zotov got tired of rubbing soap into his face when we heard steps in the hall. The guard on duty opened our cell door and called out Steve's name. Steve got up and left behind the guard who locked the door. "Get to the window and watch for Steve and the two women." Maks ordered me. "And I will shave that bore!" Unfortunately nobody was to be seen. "Maybe they are taking them to the NKVD, to the other building." someone remarked barely audibly. "Maybe." Maks said as he finished shaving one-half of Zotov's face. "Excellent!" beamed Zotov. "Now, Maks, start on the other half!"

At that moment we heard the key turn in the padlock and suddenly a militiaman appeared in the open cell door. Maks sneaked the razor into a pocket of his jacket and Zotov sat on the shelf-bed sideways so that the guard could see only the unshaved half of his face. Now Altman sent for Maks. "Take your belongings and those of the guy who left before!" the militiaman ordered. After a while the door closed. The rest of us were dumbfounded. Where were all those people disappearing? The two women had not returned to their cell either and a militiaman came for their belongings. "Well, now it will be my turn." I said to my cell mates and put my things together. Suddenly we heard people running in the hall, someone jerked open the "judas" and in that moment it seemed to me that I saw simultaneously two faces in the 4 x 4 inch opening, those of Steve and Maks. "They are releasing those from west of the Bug River!" the two shrieked in almost inhuman voices and, before I managed to ask anything, vanished. Zotov became obviously excited. There he was with one half of his face shaved and the other one not, and on top of everything without the razor which had remained in Maks' pocket. I emptied my rucksack of bread, butter and tobacco, which I left for my cell mates. I hailed from west of the Bug River, from Warsaw. A few more people could expect to be released but for the rest it would be the prison camps all over again.

When the guard on duty appeared in the cell door and this time called my name, I was ready and immediately stepped out into the hall. "Go to Comrade Altman's office." He said. He looked real surprised when I told him I did not know where it was ("You must have been there many times."). He showed me the way after I explained to him that Altman had never called me. It was already getting dark when I mounted the stairs to the second floor, and I had to feel each step. Finally I found myself on the second floor and started walking along a long hall at the end of which was Altman's office. Out of a side room stepped out Maks carrying a lit kerosene lamp. "You wish to see Comrade Altman?" he asked in Russian with an impudent expression on his face but barely able to keep from bursting into outright laughter. "I will announce you." and he entered the office without knocking on the door. After a short time Maks came out without the lamp, said: "The chief is waiting for you." and went into a room off the hall. I knocked on the

door and a voice answered" "Come in." I stepped into the office which was identical to that of the NKVD commandant who a month earlier had filled out the questionnaire in my presence. On the desk stood the kerosene lamp brought by Maks. Altman was sitting behind the desk and to one side of it sat the Deputy District Militia Commandant in the uniform of a lieutenant with a cap on his head.

Altman greeted me like an old friend but without extending his hand (NKVD employees did not shake hands with "ordinary mortals" and neither did they accept cigarettes or tobacco when offered to them by "ordinary mortals"): "How are you feeling? You got thin on prison fare." "Little wonder," I said. "I have never heard of anyone looking well after spending time in prison." We both laughed. Then Altman said: "Here is the deal. I am going to let you go free but you have to declare in writing why you consider yourself a Polish citizen and why you refuse to accept our passport. Write that you were born in Warsaw, that you attended a Polish gimnazium (high school) and a Polish university, and put down the names of both. Emphasize that your parents were Polish born, that you were brought up in the Polish spirit and tradition, etc. Anyway I don't have to tell you what to write. After all you are an intelligent individual. Paper, ink and a pen are in the next room. And write your declaration in two languages: Russian and Polish." I started toward the door when Altman exclaimed after me: "One more thing! Do me a favor and tell the two old women in that room to sign the declarations which Maks and Steve wrote for them. I want to set them free but they just persist at refusing to sign anything." I went into the next room, wrote my declaration and explained to the two old women that they could sign the two declarations written for them by Maks and Steve because Altman was not going to trick them and had no intention of giving them Soviet passports.

When I returned to Altman's office carrying my declaration as well as those of the two old women, Steve was already there. Altman carefully read the Polish text of my declaration, reached for his pack of cigarettes and extended it to Steve and to me. Each took a cigarette and lit it from the kerosene lamp on the desk. "General Sowinski Gimnazium." Altman read in a low voice from the Polish copy of my declaration. "If I am not mistaken the general was a hero of the 1831 Uprising and your poet Mickiewicz wrote about him in one of his poems." I listened in astonishment while Altman expounded about the friendship between Mickiewicz and the Russian poet Pushkin. He asked me whether or not I had read Pushkin and liked him. I answered in the affirmative. Altman also knew the works of Sienkiewicz and Zeromski. Then he switched to the writings of Russian poet Mayakovsky. I admitted that I did not understand his writings and Altman explained to me why it was difficult to "dig" Mayakovsky's poems. We talked for close to an hour and finally the NKVD man said to us: "So you are free and in a month you must secure Polish passports, you know, the navy blue booklets with an eagle on the cover, in which we will later place a permit for residing in the Soviet Union. Now I would like you to help me by writing declarations for those Poles whom I will set free. Many of them cannot even write in Polish."

We gladly agreed and I interjected that it would be helpful if each of us were given some certificate upon our release. Otherwise when we return to Sergeyevka Anna Pavlovna, the mayor, would assume that we had escaped from prison. Consequently, she would load us on a wagon and bring back to Koshki. And the same thing would happen in the other villages. "You are right." The lieutenant and District Militia Commandant's deputy said lending his support. "We will prepare certificates by the time you are through with the declarations." Steve and I wrote until midnight while Maks ran around like crazy all over the building delivering Altman's orders and spreading the news.

When we finished writing Altman handed each one of us the certificates, small pieces of paper with the following statement typed on a typewriter: "This certificate is being issued to Citizen..., born on... in Warsaw, who was released from confinement and given the deadline May 10, 1943, to prove his citizenship." The paper was signed by the Deputy District Militia Commandant and a round seal was affixed to it. That evening a few more people were released. From our village Sergeyevka only Jozia, the girl who had arrived with the Bazyluks and who worked as a laundress in the Home, was also released. We went downstairs to the guard room and the guard on duty phoned the "Home of the Collective Farmer" to put us up for the night. Stefek and Maks picked up their belts, shoelaces and penknives which they had surrendered prior to imprisonment. Finally we said goodbye to Koftin, who was on duty that night, and went toward the inn.

None of us could believe that we were actually free. It seemed just like a dream. Maks told us with an expression of importance on his face that Tuesday evening Altman would be returning to Kuibyshev

because he had asked Maks to come in the morning to help him pack. "I am not sure yet whether I will come," Maks said to Altman. "Because you may again put me in the 'clink'." We had to knock on the door of the "Home of the Collective Farmer" for a good half hour before the maid let us in. She led us through the door to the left into a large room with wooden plank beds along each wall, the cheapest accommodations. The room made me think of a morgue. All of the beds were occupied and the stench was beyond description. We stretched out on the floor, put our bundles under our heads and immediately fell asleep after a day full of surprises.

The next morning we woke up at dawn because we wanted to return home as soon as possible. While we were paying for our lodgings (1 *ruble* per person), I had a chance to peek into the "luxurious part" of the inn which one entered from the hallway through a door to the right. The door led into a dilapidated "drawing-room" with two windows, a table covered with a dirty, worn-out oilcloth and four chairs. Under one of the walls there were two cabinets. A samovar stood on one of them, a telephone on the other one. A clock, portraits of Lenin and Stalin as well as May Day slogans publicizing the spring sowing campaign decorated the walls. A small hallway led from the "drawing-room" to a few two- and three-person rooms with bare electric bulbs on the ceilings and iron beds with bedding.

Steve and Maks had some bread left, so we divided it among the three of us, rolled longer cigarettes and started on our way. We could not walk very fast because the thick mud covering the road forced us to pick out drier spots. Particularly difficult were the three kilometers (2 miles) between Koshki and the railroad crossing at the Pogruznaya station. Although beyond that crossing the road was no drier, we took a short-cut through the fields toward Little Sergeyevka which was visible on the horizon. On the way we reminisced about our imprisonment, imagined the surprise of our housemates, the jealousy of those who had accepted Soviet passports and made plans to go to the Embassy and secure Polish passports as soon as the roads were dry.

When we were quite far from Koshki and maybe even in Little Sergeyevka, people were just getting up at home. They took turns washing up and getting dressed, then putting the room in order and having breakfast. However, that day, April 10, 1943, seemed somehow different. My uncle was depressed and restless. My aunt did not feel well either and pani Bronka, who had recently turned to fortune-telling from cards and literally spent hours playing solitaire, felt particularly inspired toward fortune-telling that morning. In the spring of 1943 fortune-telling became very fashionable and the best fortune-teller was pani Justynka. One of the Polish women considered fortune-telling to be her profession and "worked" the neighboring villages earning bread, potatoes, flour and other staples.

After the table was cleared, Pani Bronka picked up her cards and asked my uncle to agree for her to tell him his fortune. My uncle, who had never believed in the occult and especially did not believe in fortune-telling, and always poked fun at Pani Bronka and Pani Justynka when they were getting ready to tell fortunes from cards, succumbed to Pani Bronka's request that morning. They sat down at the table, the "fortune-teller" with her back to the window and my uncle facing it. The cards were thoroughly shuffled, then my uncle cut the deck into three piles "with his left hand and toward his heart" and Pani Bronka spread them on the table. She looked at the cards, counted first to the left, then to the right and finally pronounced the infallible truth pointing to one of the cards: "This is an excellent card! Joy and a surprise at home! I see no official house (*i.e.* prison) in the cards! Two young men coming!" At that moment my aunt, who was standing on the side and listening, noticed a change on my uncle's face. He paled and fixed his gaze on a point outside the window. "What happened to you?" She asked terrified. "Look." My uncle answered turning his gaze away from the window. "Am I seeing things? Look there!" Both my aunt and pani Bronka simultaneously looked through the window. It was no apparition. Down the road were coming the "three musketeers" Steve, Maks and I. The fourth one was a "female musketeer," Jozia. Well, words cannot describe what took place in the cabin. The adults sat down to listen to our stories. Kathy and Milosz squealed with joy and Grusha's children peeked through the door at "Uncle Mike" and "Uncle Steve."

While Maks and Steve were relating their stories, I was shaving. It was my first activity upon returning from prison. The ten-day beard itched and generally bothered me. I shaved with such particular pleasure I had never felt before in my life. After washing up and during breakfast I related my prison experiences. In the meantime the news about our return spread like wildfire throughout the village and

acquaintances both close and not so close came visiting. As we expected a few NKVD agents among our visitors, we did not delve into the details and acted very tired which was not too difficult to do after a 15-kilometer (10 mile) march. The visitors, unable to find out any details from us, left convinced that we had accepted Soviet passports but that we did not want to divulge our secret. Finally the visits ended and when we were in our own circle at dinner, my uncle described the recent events in the village.

Actually nothing earth shattering had happened except that the new director had attempted to introduce new rules in the Indom. Because he encountered resistance, he blamed everything on my uncle and shared his remarks with the invalids. The biggest problem was the boys who, according to the new director, were egged on by my uncle. Anna Pavlovna visited our lodgings under the pretext of inquiring about my uncle's health but she was actually checking to make sure that he would not escape. Michael, the former Trustee of the Embassy, passed through Sergeyevka once on his way to Koshki but the women, the invalids and especially the boys and girls met him with catcalls and whistles. Since that encounter he had been sneaking around Sergeyevka using a side road behind the farm's stables. Aunt Masha, the miller's wife, had sent a loaf of white bread and some zwieback for me to have in prison with Nina but nobody went to Koshki because it was thawing. By the time the two Rozas went to Koshki, all of the bread was gone.

That afternoon Steve and I went to the windmill to thank Aunt Masha for her thoughtfulness during our imprisonment. She was so happy to see us that we got smothered with her hugs and kisses. As usual we spent a few pleasant hours at the windmill listening to Nina and Lisa play their guitars and sing. Bazyli, now the new Indom director's right hand man and Nina's most recent suitor, also came. They would have made a nice pair because Bazyli was a quiet, hard working and handsome young man. Unfortunately, the war separated those two. After a month Nina was sent to help "rebuild" Stalingrad, whereas Bazyli was drafted into the Kosciuszko Division of the new Polish Army being established by the Union of Polish Patriots, a communist front organization. Nina returned the next winter telling horror stories about people being blown up on the banks of the Volga River while clearing mine fields with their bare hands. Bazyli returned after a year, an alcoholic and an invalid with a shattered ankle, one of the many victims of the battle at Lenino. Despite Bazyli's remaining in love with Nina, she rejected him. Nina felt an aversion to drunks, perhaps because the miller liked to drink and had a tendency to overdo it especially when vodka was easily available. We returned home in the evening. Maks and the hunchbacked Pani Justynka came for a visit, she carrying vodka in a Nestle's powdered milk can to celebrate "our boys' safe return." It was already after 10 o'clock when Anna Pavlovna dropped in. "I am very glad you are back," she said. Then she downed a shot of vodka, had an English cigarette and left.

The next day my uncle, Maks, Steve and I met to decide on a plan of action for the immediate future. There had been no news from the Embassy. Stephen did not return knowing full well that the militia were on the lookout for him in the district. From time to time someone in the village received a cable from the Embassy stating that the addressee was a Polish citizen. These cables were in response to the rosters of arrested Poles which had reached the Embassy through various messengers from the district.

There was no news from Mr. Milewicz, and we suspected that censorship must have been severely tightened because Pani Bronka would otherwise had received word from her husband. One could not draw any conclusions about Polish-Soviet political relations from the local or even central Soviet newspapers. We were totally in the dark! Once while I was still in prison a brief note appeared in the local paper to the effect that the Germans had found some mass graves of murdered Polish officers in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk and that the Polish Government-in-Exile in London had requested that an International Red Cross Commission be sent to the site of the crime.

My uncle felt that the cash balance of the Home for Polish Invalids, about 1120 *rubles*, as well as the document transferring the administration of the Home to Soviet authorities, inventory and cash ledgers, and documents pertaining to the distribution of food supplies and clothing, which were still in his possession should be forwarded to the Social Welfare Department of the Embassy. He also wanted to secure Polish passports for Steve and me as well as to get a feeling for the overall situation. Consequently, he decided to go to Kuibyshev to the Embassy. Maks agreed to accompany him and the whole undertaking was to be kept secret. In view of the visits by Anna Pavlovna and the other people who

would notice my uncle's absence, we decided to lay the groundwork by telling them ahead of time that he would be going to Melekess in order to forward all of the documents and cash pertaining to the Home to a representative sent by the Embassy. Anna Pavlovna, who by now visited us every other day, was told that my uncle would depart for Melekess in about 10 days.

One day before my uncle's planned trip to Kuibyshev and shortly after we returned from prison, our room was "invaded" by pani Hanka, the former cook in the Home, pani Mila, the former baker and by old man Duron. They came to demand their ration of flour for March. Since all of the food supplies of the Home had been forwarded to the new administration of the Indom, the new director was supposed to give them the flour which was rightly theirs. When they came to him for flour he told them: "I do not have your flour. The previous director took your flour, a sack of sugar and even a sack of shoes which he left in storage at the windmill." Michael, the former Embassy Trustee, also had mentioned to someone that my uncle took out of the bank in Koshki several thousand *rubles* which were to be distributed among the Polish exiles in the district and used it instead to buy a cow together with the Sznycers from Petrovka. The truth of the matter was that the Sznycers bought a cow themselves. Simply vicious whispers were a sufficient stimulus for the dregs of the Polish society to bring out the worst in them. They threatened to inform "where necessary and demand justice" implying in no uncertain terms the NKVD. We suspected that several signed denunciations found their way into our dossiers, which were kept by district NKVD. A few days later we discovered that our suspicions were correct.

One day before his trip, when my uncle went to a neighboring village to buy some tobacco, the door to our room opened and who should come in but Michael, the former Embassy Trustee. My aunt, who was putting away some things, stopped for a moment and then continued with her work. Pani Bronka was scrubbing the floor and did not even raise her head. Steve and I were sitting on a bench and the children were outside. Michael said hello and I responded with a grunt. Steve did not even go that far. Michael sat down on a stool under one wall and tried to make conversation by asking about my uncle, about Kathy and Milosz, and about whether or not pani Bronka had received any letters from her husband, Mr. Milewicz. Nobody uttered a word. Michael continued to talk and explained why he had to accept a Soviet passport, dismissed the story about the money misappropriated and the cow as vicious gossip which had not originated with him and damned old pani Helena and her "girls." We kept silent and continued what we had been doing. Finally he stopped his monolog, said goodbye and left.

Later that day Maks returned from Koshki full of news and stories. He had packed Altman's things for his return to Kuibyshev including some hamburger sandwiches, and even rode with Altman and the Militia Commandant to the train station. "I saw with my own eyes that Altman boarded the train." Maks said assuredly. "Now we can live without any worry. And do you know what the Commandant said? He said it was a good idea to ship the Gypsies to a prison camp near Melekess because their families followed them and chickens and geese stopped disappearing in the Koshki district. In the villages where the Gypsies used to live, all of the poultry is gone."

My uncle gathered various documents, took with him our photographs (my aunt's, Steve's and mine), and left for Kuibyshev at dawn on April 19, 1943. Maks left at the same time but separately, and the two met outside Sergeyevka. We started counting the days until my uncle's return. In the meantime Steve visited the neighboring villages taking with him different things like items of clothing, a blanket or a package of tea, all things which he exchanged for food products.

The Easter Holidays were approaching and pani Justynka promised to make such a "Swiecone" (Easter meal Polish style) for the children in the Indom that "they would remember it for the rest of their lives." Although the new director had hired a tutor for the children, the evacuee from Leningrad whom we had met at the Pogruznaya railroad station when we had arrived the previous summer and, who thanks to my uncle's intervention with the village mayor settled on our collective farm, pani Justynka considered herself to be the guardian of the children. Her right-hand man and *aide-de-camp* was Jozek, "the American."

On Easter Sunday the Indom was a beehive of activity. From the early morning pani Justynka brought roast geese, pierogi with pumpkin filling, white rolls and cookies which she had baked throughout the night at the Kowalskis' in the village. In their quarters the girls set a table made from someone's plank

bed and covered it with someone's bed sheet. The feast was to be both sumptuous and unimpeded because the director, the bookkeeper and the warehouse manager had gone to Koshki. As the administrators were not around, the Russian tutor conveniently stayed with her family in the village. It turned out that pani Justynka even provided vodka. Despite intense invitations by the "hostess" ("You will be my guests and not the director's!") both my aunt and pani Bronka decided against showing up.

The miller's wife wanted to exchange some flour for a blanket or some cloths so both women went to the mill instead. On the way back they decided to pass by the Indom out of curiosity. In the girls' quarters the feast seemed to be at its climax. When the girls saw my aunt and pani Bronka through a window they ran outside, grabbed their arms and pulled them inside the Indom. The two women were helpless and no admonitions or excuses did any good. They were led into the girls' quarters and were horrified by what they saw. Pani Justynka was completely drunk and could not even get up from the bench on which she was sitting. The boys were also drunk and were sprawled around the table on the floor. Mendelek, staggering between the girls' straw mattresses and the improvised table, came up to my aunt, started to cry and kiss her hands. "I love you, Madame!" He squealed like a butchered piglet. The girls, assisted by the sitting Pani Justynka, forced their two unexpected guests to partake of the food. When my aunt and Pani Bronka returned home, only Kathy, Milosz, Steve, I and pani Maria, who used to cook for us in the Home, sat down to dinner. The two of them were full; Pani Justynka cooked very well: the poultry dishes as well as the baked goods at that Easter feast were superb.

Abandoned

Since the only place where one could get hold of a newspaper and read it was the local post office, I used to go there daily at the time when the mail and the newspapers were brought from Koshki. In the local paper on Easter Monday I spotted a short paragraph mentioning the arrival in Moscow of the Polish Ambassador, Tadeusz Romer. There was no clue whatsoever about whether the talks in Moscow would influence the Polish-Soviet relationship positively or negatively. A few days later the newspapers reported the break of diplomatic relations between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Government of the Soviet Union. Now everything was clear and the situation of the Poles in the Soviet Union was desperate! If the Soviet passports were offered at this point, it would be absurd not to accept them. Those Poles who had been sentenced to two-year terms in prison camps would have to remain there for the duration of their sentences or as long as they survived, because now there was nobody to intercede on their behalf.

Pani Bronka was brokenhearted worrying that her husband would leave with the other Embassy personnel and that she would remain with Milosz in the Soviet Union. We were especially worried about my uncle. Anna Pavlovna also came one day and inquired about whether or not we had had any news from him and when he would be back. Two days later all of the newspapers printed a bulletin of the *Narkoindiel* (Commissariat for Foreign Affairs) explaining the reasons for the break of diplomatic relations between the two governments. In a nutshell the following reasons were given: (1) Personnel of the Polish Embassy and Embassy representatives in the various areas of the country had engaged in espionage activities, (2) Six divisions of Gen. Anders' Polish Army, completely armed and equipped at the expense of the Soviet Government, had been evacuated to the Middle East, (3) Suspicion that an ally, the Soviet Government, was implicated in the murder of 11,000 Polish prisoners of war, including more than 4,000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest and a request for an Investigating Commission of the International Red Cross, despite assurances to the contrary provided by the Soviet Government.

At the May Day rally which took place in the club house, Aleksey Arkhipovich, a war invalid and a party member from Stalingrad, delivered a highly inflammatory anti-Polish speech. He was a vicious Pole-hater and finally had his revenge. I had never checked how much truth there was in the malicious story that Aleksey Arkhipovich was wounded near Lwow in 1939 where a piece of Polish shrapnel regrettably deprived him of his masculinity.

On May 3rd after dinner a cable arrived from Kuibyshev. It was addressed to pani Bronka and was signed by the Polish Ambassador, Tadeusz Romer. The cable directed pani Bronka to obtain an exit visa from the Soviet Union at the District Militia Headquarters in Koshki. A few minutes later a girl who was on duty in the mayor's office came with a telephone message from the Militia Commandant in Koshki that pani Bronka should immediately report to his office. Steve offered to accompany her. They returned at 1:00 o'clock at night. In Koshki pani Bronka was told that she and Milosz would leave the country together with the Embassy personnel as dependents and that within 20 hours she should be in Kuibyshev, because the Embassy would be evacuated on May 4 in the evening. If she could not make it within that time, she would have to reach the border with Iran on her own. Flustered and helpless pani Bronka returned home where a cable from her husband already waited for her. In it Mr. Milewicz told her that he would arrive by car in the morning on May 4 to pick up Milosz and her.

That night we slept only a few hours. Pani Bronka was totally dazed. She did not know how to pack or what to pack, and consequently decided to leave everything for us. It was quite an indescribable experience, her three-year dream of leaving the Soviet Union was finally coming true; she would no longer have to be afraid of her own shadow. After breakfast Milosz, Steve and Grusha's two boys climbed onto the roof to watch for the car. Around 11 o'clock they bounced into the room announcing that they could see the approaching car. A few minutes later an Embassy limousine, already without the Polish ensign, stopped in front of our cabin. Mr. Milewicz and the driver, a Greek, got out of the car. Mr. Milewicz was lugging two suitcases full of clothes and food supplies which he had brought for us from the Embassy. Milosz was delighted to see his father while Pani Bronka continued to move around in a daze. While Pani Marysia busied herself preparing dinner, we talked with Mr. Milewicz. However, we did not touch upon the disastrous political situation; Mr. Milewicz warned me when I was taking him to the outhouse that the Greek chauffeur was an NKVD employee who understood Polish perfectly because he had served as the Polish Embassy chauffeur driver before 1939. Of course, we asked about my uncle.

Mr. Milewicz had seen him and had even talked with him once or twice. My uncle stayed in a building housing the offices of the Military Attache, Col. Rudnicki, and was under the colonel's care whereas Mr. Milewicz had a room in the Embassy building. The office of the Military Attache was located on Leo Tolstoy Street just around the corner from the entrance to the Embassy which was located on Chapayevska Street. At that time employees of the Embassy tried not to venture outside the buildings because they were afraid of being kidnapped by the NKVD despite their diplomatic status.

On the whole we noticed that Mr. Milewicz was rather close-mouthed and actually panicked when pani Justynka showed up with Mendelek and Wladek. The boys came to bid farewell to their buddy, Milosz, while pani Justynka was just on a fishing expedition. However, Mr. Milewicz answered her questions reluctantly and in monosyllables. She left promptly and her feelings had obviously been hurt. The vodka that Mr. Milewicz had brought came in handy at dinner and shortly after the meal was over, we said goodbye to the Milewiczes and to Milosz. It was a difficult parting. Although we had known one another for only four months, we had lived through a lot together and shared experiences which bring people close together faster than time. Pani Bronka cried, promised to write and vowed not to forget us. Mr. Milewicz was deeply moved and thanked us profusely for everything that we had done for his wife and Milosz. When the car left and we returned to our room, Kathy remarked, my cousin remarked to my aunt: "You know what, Mother. It is empty and sad now. I think it is better just not to get used to people!"

We were seriously worried about my uncle. Fifteen days had passed since his departure; the Polish Embassy personnel had left the country, but he was nowhere to be seen. My aunt could not sleep nights and could think of only two reasons for his not returning: either he had been arrested or he had been spirited away by the Embassy. Neither possibility looked good, but at least the second one offered some hope that my aunt would get out of the Soviet Union despite having taken a Soviet passport. The week was coming to an end and my uncle had not returned as yet. When my aunt cried Kathy attempted to console her, and when Kathy cried that her father had not returned, my aunt consoled her.

That Friday pani Justynka paid us a visit. Of course, she criticized Mr. Milewicz unmercifully: "Such an important bastard! Just because he worked in the Embassy he could not answer one's questions and instead was condescending to people! Who knows what he did in that Embassy! Maybe he cleaned the toilets! Pretended, mind you, to be a 'Mr. Big Shot' and left for 'Teherans' while you, people, stay in that f..... Soviet Union! Eh, nobody is like our Pan Dyrektor ('Mr. Director' meaning my uncle)! Let me look into my cards!" She pulled a deck out of one of her pockets, shuffled the cards, took up her "fortune telling stance" as we used to joke with my aunt, and began spreading the cards on the table. Since pani Justynka was short because of her lameness, she never sat down when fortunetelling. The table was too high for her and she just stood next to it with one leg propped up on a chair. Marysia, Henryk's fiancée, used to call her "The Little One," while Jozek ("the American") used to say in his Polish peasant's dialect: "Oh! 'The Little One' is rolling by!" This time the cards offered hope. "He (*i.e.* my uncle) will come home just like 'Amen' comes at the end of a prayer!" Pani Justynka finished and gathered her cards. According to custom we did not thank her for fortune telling because then it would not come true.

That Sunday my aunt, Steve and I went to visit the millers. The mood at the mill was very sad, as if someone had died. Nina had been drafted to work in Stalingrad. Three months had passed since the end of the "Battle for Stalingrad." For almost half a year the Russians and the Germans had fought in the city. Survivors of that battle with whom I had the opportunity to talk reported that it was difficult to tell which side was on the defense and which on the offense. In the beginning the Germans surrounded the Russians, then the Russians surrounded the Germans who had the Russians surrounded. The city became one big pile of rubble. In the end the Russians destroyed the Sixth German Army, took its commander, Field Marshall von Paulus, prisoner and even entered Kharkov, 350 miles west of Stalingrad, but had to withdraw from it promptly because of over extended supply lines. Now that Stalingrad had been Soviet territory for the past three months (one could not call it a city anymore), the process of rebuilding the city, or rather cleaning up the rubble, had begun. To do that the members of *Komsomol*, the Young Communist League, were drafted from all over the country. Nina was a member of the *Komsomol* and, although her parents were not happy about it, she had to join in order to avoid possible discrimination in her future plans. She was not active in the organization even at the local level and really was only waiting for an appropriate opportunity to turn in her membership card. The secretary of the local *Komsomol* cell was Roza Kalman, Nina's friend. However, since the winter their relationship

had gone sour. Nina claimed that Roza was jealous about Stefan, who sometimes visited Nina at the mill or danced with her in the club. A month had already elapsed since Stefan had left for Kuibyshev and had not returned. Roza was depressed and embittered. The announced draft of the *Komsomol* members for the work in Stalingrad provided Roza with an opportunity to vent her anger by appointing Nina and a few of the peasant girls from our village to go to Stalingrad. The millers were brokenhearted, but nothing could be done about it. Besides Steve and I had our own problems. The next day was the deadline for the presentation of Polish passports and we had to go to the militia headquarters in Koshki either to accept Soviet passports or to go to prison again after a month of freedom.

We were consoling Aunt Masha and joking with Nina when the miller pulled up on his bicycle. Dismounting he said to my aunt: "Your husband is returning. I just passed him entering the village." We immediately left the millers and hurried home. My uncle was already sitting at the table. How happy were we to see him! In the excitement we did not know what to ask him first, so we asked him about his health. It was fine although he was tired after the trip. My uncle brought two Polish passports with him: one for my aunt and one for me. The Embassy had refused to issue a passport for Steve because he was not a member of our family. Needless to say Steve became depressed about not having a Polish document for presentation to the militia headquarters the next day. Fortunately Anna Pavlovna came that evening and even spared us the trip to Koshki. She asked for Steve's and my certificates issued by Altman when we were released from prison. On the backside of each she wrote "Do not report to Koshki until further notice." Then she signed this statement and validated it with the round seal of her office.

For the next several days we listened to my uncle's stories about his trip to Kuibyshev and about his stay in there. He and Maks had made the whole trip on foot (almost 100 miles!) and on the way had met many people from our district making their way in the same direction. Not far from Kuibyshev they were passed by an old Ford with two passengers. It was already noon when they stopped in a village for a meal. By that time they were joined by pan Rafal, my former cell mate from the Koshki prison and a young boy from the "Engels" collective farm. They were sitting in one of the cabins when the door burst open and the two passengers from that old Ford entered the room dressed in leather coats and with their revolvers drawn ordered everybody to raise their hands. They searched everyone thoroughly and, after discovering that nobody had any arms, permitted them to drop their hands. Now all four were under arrest. While one of the men was examining the contents of a knapsack, the other one (who turned out to be the NKVD commandant of the Kuibyshev Province), Popov, was recording everything. Of course, my uncle interested him the most, especially because the NKVD man found a lot of different papers in his rucksack. In the evening Popov let them go on the condition that my uncle reported to him in Kuibyshev. Undoubtedly at that moment my uncle as well as the NKVD man knew full well that it would not happen except that Popov also knew that he could always find my uncle. The two NKVD men left taking the papers found in my uncle's knapsack with them. The next morning the four Poles started toward Kuibyshev and at noon after a four day journey they at their destination.

Although the Embassy was heavily guarded, they managed to jump onto the stairs leading to the entrance door. A militiaman grabbed Maks by the sleeve of his overcoat but it happened close enough to the stairs and Maks managed to free himself. The people in the Social Welfare Department were very glad to see my uncle. "The cash balance of the Home and various documents were not worth endangering your health and your freedom," the head of the Department told him. All afternoon my uncle reported on the "passport action" in our district and everything was duly recorded. After supper my uncle met a very close friend of his who also came to secure Polish passports for himself and his family. They lived in Davlekanovo near Ufa and in their province only those individuals who had lived prior to November 1, 1939, on territories occupied by the Red Army received Soviet passports. The others were ineligible for that dubious honor and were told to secure Polish passports from the Embassy. We always dreamed about being together with those friends but since becoming separated in Lwow during the "displacement action," we always found ourselves close to them but never together. That had happened in the forests when they were 30 km (20 miles) from us and it was the same now. Davlekanovo was 40 km (25 miles) west of Ufa, just a few hours by train from Pogruznaya.

That evening after supper my uncle was taken to the building that housed the office of the Military Attache. Even though the entrance to it was just around the corner from the entrance to the Embassy, he was driven in an Embassy car to foil any attempt by the NKVD to pick him up. Maks remained in the

Embassy building where he managed to settle in the warehouse thanks to his being acquainted with the manager, Piotrowski. Old pani Helena also stayed in the Embassy building. All of the residents in the Embassy's dormitory on Galaktyonovska Street had been arrested. Those who accepted Soviet passports were released and sent out from the city to the Koshki district. Among those who remained in the prison were Andzia, Piotrowski's mistress. Every day he carried food parcels to her. He tried in vain to have her released. This time none of his pull worked.

While staying in the building that housed the office of the Military Attache, my uncle busied himself with reading books and listening to radio bulletins from London. The Polish Government-in-Exile had detailed information about Soviet authorities forcing Polish exiles to accept Soviet passports. The broadcasts from London constantly provided new details of that action. There were also bulletins about the Germans publishing rosters of Polish officers murdered in the Katyn Forest and about their sending a Polish commission to Katyn composed of such German collaborators as Skiwinski and the writer, Ferdynand Goetel, as well as a former prime minister Leon Kozlowski, who as a captain in Gen. Anders' Polish Army in the Soviet Union had crossed the front lines to the German side. The Germans also published depositions given by witnesses and reports of autopsies performed on the exhumed bodies all of which attested to the fact that each officer had been shot with a single revolver bullet in the back of the head. The whole world was shocked by this brutal murder of defenseless Polish officers.

A few days before Easter a Polish government bulletin reported about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. Despite the "local" problems related to the Polish-Soviet political situation all of the Embassy personnel followed with interest, sympathy and concern the heroic fight in the Warsaw Ghetto. Mr. Milewicz and the head of the Social Welfare Department frequently visited my uncle and kept him informed about the events in the world outside. He found out from them that Henryk, Father Wladyslaw, Stefan and countless other Poles had come to the Embassy, picked up clothes, returned home and then came again to secure a supply of clothing for their families. The Embassy was emptying its stores and giving everyone as much as they could carry away. This was not much of a consolation, because people were arrested on the street as soon as they left Embassy grounds and imprisoned. Those who had Soviet passports were released but in the meantime part of their possessions which were kept by the prison authorities "for safekeeping" disappeared. There was a glimmer of hope when Ambassador Romer went to Moscow but his cable about the break in diplomatic relationships between the Polish and Soviet governments dashed even that. Then the Embassy let people into its warehouse to pick the better and more valuable items. My uncle was offered gold coins to take with him but he refused knowing full well that he would be picked up as soon as he stepped outside of the Embassy and having gold on him would only aggravate his situation.

One day Mr. Sroczynski visited my uncle and told him about an idea which had been discussed in the Embassy with Judge Kasinski, Counselor Frejd and the First Secretary of the Embassy. The idea was to put my uncle into a crate and spirit him abroad with the Embassy's baggage. The Soviet government was providing a special train, consisting of passenger and freight cars, from Kuibyshev directly to the Iranian border. But then they thought about what would happen if at the border crossing the Soviet authorities decided to examine the baggage and started opening the crates. So that idea was abandoned and my uncle was to start on his way back carrying with him two watches, a few bars of toilet soap, several small packages of tea and 10,000 *rubles* in cash. The previous day Mr. Sroczynski had forwarded 5000 *rubles* by mail to my aunt. It turned out she had never received that money.

My uncle was placed in one of the Embassy's cars to be driven out of the city. His chances of not being arrested were nil. The militiaman at the gate reported every car leaving the grounds on a direct line to the nearest police station and the car was immediately followed. My uncle was to be driven out of the Embassy on May Day in the hope that there would be decreased vigilance on the part of the NKVD, because of the holiday traffic and manifestations. While the idea was a good one and might have worked in any other country, it did not work in the Soviet Union. The car taking my uncle drove for several blocks turning here and there to try and shake off any possible pursuers and finally the car stopped and my uncle was let out in the middle of a block. The Embassy car pulled away and my uncle did not even manage to reach the nearest street corner when an old black Ford screeched to a halt at the sidewalk and two NKVD men dressed in identical ill-fitting grey suits jumped out of it. "Please follow us. We are NKVD men." They said to my uncle. He was driven to Militia Station No. 1 and, after having been relieved

of the things he had on him, was placed in a cell where he was imprisoned until May 8th. Every once in a while he was called before the commandant of the police station and the head of the NKVD Passport Office. Even the NKVD commandant of Kuibyshev Province, Popov, showed up to interrogate him. They tried to find out if the Embassy had purposely left my uncle behind so that he would engage in diversionary activities on behalf of the Polish government.

In my uncle's cell there were several Russians as well as two young boys from Poland, Franek and Julek, with whom my uncle made friends. Julek was a tailor's apprentice. Franek had been separated from a relative with whom he had been in a labor camp and recently worked in a factory in Kuibyshev. The boys did not know what to do, so my uncle advised them to accept the Soviet passports and head for our district where something could possibly be arranged for them. Since Franek looked younger than his 17 years, there was a chance of his being accepted as an orphan in the Indom. When my uncle was released they remained behind still contemplating whether or not accept the Soviet passports. Near the Gypsy Bazaar my uncle found a truck going to our district. The driver agreed to take him provided that my uncle would sell him a watch for 3300 *rubles*. Because the driver kept 300 *rubles* as the fare my uncle only realized 3000 *rubles*. Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, knew about my uncle's arrest at the time that she stopped to inquire about whether or not we had had any news of him.

Two days after my uncle's return a note arrived from the Pogruznaya train station for pani Bronka requesting her to pick up a 70-pound food package shipped from Chkalov. Before her departure pani Bronka empowered us to receive any correspondence, parcels and money orders addressed to her. Steve and I left for the station on May 13. We borrowed a two-wheeled cart from the school's principal and alternately pulled or pushed it all the way to the station, attempting to do all kinds of tricks that the street porters in Warsaw did before the war to make their jobs easier. Nevertheless we arrived dead tired at Pogruznaya after a 12-kilometer (7.5-mile) trip, picked up the package and decided to rest at least an hour before starting back. We sat down in the shadow of a large tree on one side of the platform so as to make ourselves least visible.

While we were resting a freight train pulled up to the station with its flatcars loaded with new tanks destined for the front. Soldiers armed with automatic weapons and young officers all dressed up in the new style uniforms strolled along the train. Several months before newly styled uniforms with shoulder straps were introduced in the Red Army. I recalled when the miller, Uncle Alosha, remarked at that time: "I bet you there must be hundreds of thousands of Red Army officers who in 1917 were ripping shoulder straps from the tsar's officers blouses and now have to wear *pagony* (shoulder straps in Russian) themselves. They are no more the *komandirs* (leaders) who used to share their sleeping quarters with the privates. Now they are officers and a private is only a lowly private." At the time when the new style uniforms were introduced many new regulations were also published. For example, an officer's wife had to have at least a high school education and an officer had to secure his superior's permission to marry the woman he wanted to marry.

On the other side of the platform and in the shadow of a tree we noticed Bazyli and Nina. May 13th was her birthday and this year on that day she was leaving for work in Stalingrad. Bazyli came on a bicycle which he had borrowed from the Zelmanskis. Once we rested we approached the two of them, said goodbye to Nina, wished her a speedy return and started on our way back. We arrived in Sergeyevka late that evening barely able to move. However, the reward for our pains exceeded everybody's expectations. The contents of that package turned out to be a real treasure. There were 50 pounds of cream of wheat, 2 pounds of sugar, large amounts of navy beans and powdered milk, and several large containers of canned meat. Now we had sufficient staples to last us some time and when they ran out, we would exchange clothing for food. Nevertheless Steve and I had to find some work. We went to see the chairman of the collective farm, Sergey Stepanovich. For the time being he had enough workers but when the haymaking and the threshing started he would gladly hire us.

For the next few days the papers were again full of news pertaining to the Polish question. A meeting of some Polish refugees chaired by the Polish writer Wanda Wasilewska had taken place in Moscow. As a result of this meeting a new Polish organization, the Union of Polish Patriots, was formed. The following goals were drafted by the Union: (1) to struggle against the Nazi invaders and to liberate occupied Poland, (2) to form a Polish Army which would fight shoulder to shoulder with the Red Army, (3)

to organize and educate the Poles in the Soviet Union so that they would become the foundation of a new and democratic Poland. Although all of this sounded great, nevertheless the Poles in our village as well as all over the Soviet Union were not enthusiastic about the new organization but, instead, were rather suspicious of it. Well-read and politically astute individuals began to analyze the facts.

Wanda Wasilewska hailed from a well-known socialist family. In prewar Poland she had belonged to the extreme left of the socialist movement. In Lwow she joined the All-Union Communist Party (of the Bolsheviks) and was elected to the Supreme Soviet of USSR. She was the target of an attempt on her life by some Polish patriots but the actual victim was her husband. Subsequently she married Korneychuk, a top Ukrainian playwright and member of the Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars. Several more or less well-known individuals served as board members of the Union. Dr. Boleslaw Drobner, a well-known activist in the prewar Polish Socialist Party (PPS), was one who was considered in Poland to lean toward communism. Andrzej Witos was a member probably used more for publicity than for any other reason because uneducated people would confuse him with his illustrious cousin, Wincenty Witos, the head of the prewar Polish Peasant Movement and former prime minister. A Father Kupsz, supposedly a hero guerilla, was on the board to placate the Catholics and Lt. Col. Zygmunt Berling, the former chief of staff of one of Gen. Anders' divisions, was on the board to placate the former military and to head the future Polish Army. Finally a former member of the Polish Sejm (Parliament), Dr. Emil Sommerstein, was on the board to placate the Jews. Anyone could be accepted into the Union of Polish Patriots as member irrespective of sex, creed or political beliefs. However, very few people were interested in joining. At least in the beginning nobody in our district showed any interest.

That was the political situation of interest to the Poles in the Soviet Union at that time and people in our village assumed the "wait and see" attitude, when one evening Maks and Stephen showed up. They were dressed in the clothes that they had received at the Embassy. Before going to the Kalmans' for the night Stephen managed to tell us that he had found work on a collective farm in the Novo-Buyan District, 70 km (about 45 miles) from Kuibyshev. It was the same village from which Leah, little Jurek and her old mother had come to the Home for Polish Invalids. Although Stephen behaved in a very conspiratory manner, the next day everybody, including Anna Pavlovna, knew about his presence in Sergeyevka. But now no one was after him because the "passport action" was over.

Maks was more open and related his adventures with a great deal of humor. He had remained in the Embassy longer than my uncle to help with the burning of the various documents, blank Polish passports, etc. On the day of his departure Maks loaded a sack with about 170 pounds of various useful things. "I did not want them to drive me out in a car." He told us. "I would be arrested anyway, so I heaved the sack over my shoulder and left the Embassy and walked out on to the street where I dropped the sack on the sidewalk and waited. I did not have to wait long. After a short while an old black Ford pulled up, two men in ill-fitting grey suits stepped out of it, helped me to load my sack into the car and drove me to the militia station." Of course, the sack was put into storage and Maks into a cell. In the cell he met Henryk, Father Wladyslaw and Stefan. Each of them had their sacks "in storage." During the search of Maks' sack the militiaman found 12 British-made straight razors. The commandant of the station could not hide his amazement. "They probably gave you those razors in the Embassy for distribution to your people so they in turn would slit Russian throats." The commandant told Maks. The latter could hardly hide his disbelief upon hearing this statement and explained that he had taken those razors for resale because people were willing to pay over 300 *rubles* for a straight razor. But the commandant stuck to his thesis.

After a few days all four of them were released from prison but Maks' razors were never returned to him not on account of saving Russians from having their throats slit, but because the commandant of the militia station wanted to sell them himself on the black market for over 300 *rubles* a piece. Maks, Henryk, Stephen and the priest started on their way back to our district riding, drinking and bartering the things that they had taken from the Embassy along the way. No meal was without vodka. Twenty eggs scrambled for breakfast or a roast goose for dinner for four people was not extravagant to them. They wandered as long as the things they had for barter lasted. When the supply of goods ran out and only what they had on their backs was left, the "Bacchanalia" was over. Henryk and the priest hid in an out-of-the-way little village in the neighboring district, because the NKVD was still after them on account of their escape from the Koshki prison. Stefan and Maks returned to Sergeyevka. Stefan returned for a few days

just to see Roza Kalman. Maks wanted to work with Steve and me in the collective farm but there was no work as yet. Furthermore, a crisis with our living quarters arose totally unexpectedly.

Grusha's cabin in which she lived with her five children and in which we occupied a room was the nicest and best maintained cabin in the whole village. Grusha's husband, who had served as the chairman of the collective prior to his departure for the front where he had been killed, was one of the first arrivals after the German inhabitants had been exiled and he had taken over the cabin left by the village carpenter. It was a solid two-room building with very nice furniture and a part of a farmstead; i.e. a yard with a stable, barn, well, cellar and sheds all under one roof. Sergey Stepanovich, the present chairman of the collective farm, who roomed in the cabin of the collective's bookkeeper, decided it was time to bring over his wife and get settled for good. He liked Grusha's cabin and decided to evict her, not expecting any resistance on the part of a widow saddled with five kids. However, the chairman miscalculated. Grusha told him she would not move out and, furthermore, that she would report to the Military Commissar of the district how "a Fatherland defender's widow and orphans were being persecuted." Stepan Sergeyevich made it clear that if we moved out he would manage things with Grusha. She begged us not to move, but we did not want to cross the authorities. After a brief search we found one-half of a room in a neighbor's cabin. We could have found a whole room in another cabin, but we did not want to live with the Chuvashs because of the filth and trachoma so prevalent in that population. We left Grusha's cabin, and she moved into our room leaving the walk-through room for Sergey Stepanovich. A stove fitter had to put a Russian stove in the kitchen for him because there were none in the German kitchens.

We were cramped in our new quarters which were neither convenient nor cozy. The landlady, Aunt Styosha, worked as a milk maid. She was a quiet woman, who was afraid of her own shadow. Her husband had been drafted for the "Work Front" and served as a bookkeeper in some factory in Bezimyanka, a suburb of Kuibyshev. One of her daughters, Wala, had worked together with Nina, the miller's daughter, in the factory in Chapayevsk from where the two had escaped. However, for some reason only Wala was tried for desertion and sentenced to five-years in exile in the Far East near Khabarovsk where the members of the *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) were building big cities and factories barely surviving on a daily ration of 450 grams (one pound) of bread and a canteen of soup. Aunt Styosha's second daughter, Kara, married a Tatar, and worked as a bookkeeper in a Tatar collective farm 4 km (2.5 miles) from Sergeyevka. The youngest offspring, a boy named Witya, was a tractor driver. When the machines were in the fields, Witya seldom came home but despite that managed to make friends with us and with my uncle in particular.

In addition to the four of us, my aunt and uncle, Steve and myself, and Aunt Styosha there was another tenant in the room, Tanya, the saleswoman from the Selpo store, with her five-year old daughter. While Tanya's husband, a Red Army captain, was busy defending his Fatherland from the Fascist invaders, she was busy dallying with Wolodya, "The Soap Bubble." Wolodya had been sent by a factory in Kuibyshev to buy potatoes and other farm products from farmers for the factory's mess hall in exchange for soda and primarily for soap. For that reason Maks nicknamed him "The Soap Bubble." Theoretically Wolodya stayed at the Kalmans', but in practice he lived in the attic of our cabin. This had a positive side to it because Tanya kept him company and, therefore, there were fewer people in the room at night. The negative side of this arrangement was the problem that when Tanya's little daughter woke up at night crying we had to calm her down because Tanya was not always in any condition to come down from the attic.

One day the chairman of our collective farm, Sergey Stepanovich, came over with a job offer for Steve, Maks and me. The work was in a forest 30 km (20 miles) from our village, not only outside our district but even outside of the Kuibyshev Province, in the neighboring Tatar Republic. We were to work for the Lespromkhoz (the Forest Industry Organization) on behalf of our collective farm. The farm used to purchase from the Lespromkhoz linden tree bast for various needs such as rope, cord, parts of harnesses (since leather was in short supply) and bast shoes. However, the collective farm was obliged to supply the workers whose job it was to prepare a certain amount of raw material for sale. Under normal conditions the Lespromkhoz had its own workers. Now it had to request a labor force from its customers, because its workers were serving in the army. Our collective farm took it upon itself to pay each of us one and one-half workdays for the day's work and also to supply us with provisions because the mess hall at the Lespromkhoz was closed. The terms seemed pretty good, and we decided to accept the offer.

Our departure, however, had to be delayed for a few days. It turned out that the Military Commissariat of the district had prohibited sending Poles out of the village and in the meantime all of us had received orders to appear before its draft board. The orders specified that we take two changes of underwear, a pair of strong shoes and provisions for six days. We packed our knapsacks, each took a loaf of bread and some clarified butter in a small jar and went to Koshki. The farm provided two wagons for its workers, and we joined them. When we reported to the Military Commissariat in Koshki it turned out that the orders to appear before the draft board had been sent by mistake to those Poles who did not have Soviet passports. We did not even have to appear before the draft board. The others were drafted after a cursory medical examination and told that they would serve in "Tadeusz Kosciuszko Polish Army." That day Kathy Duron, Bazyli and five other men from our village were drafted.

Around the same time the Soviet press published an order of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR promoting a Polish lieutenant-colonel, Zygmunt Berling, to the rank of Polish brigadier general. Even stranger was the fact that only Poles with Soviet passports were accepted into the Polish division while those who had not been given Soviet passports, because they were considered Polish citizens, were not permitted to join the Polish army. The newspapers of the Union of Polish Patriots (UPP), "New Horizons" and "Free Poland," published laudatory articles about the new army being mustered in a camp near Moscow. The troops wore Polish style uniforms and even their drill was in Polish, only the eagles on their caps and uniform buttons lacked the customary crown. The explanation provided by the UPP was that "it was a true Polish Eagle, a Piast Eagle, because the new Poland would conduct a Piast foreign policy, take away from the Germans the territory east of the Neisse and Oder Rivers which had belonged to Poland during the rule of the Piast Dynasty until the second half of the XIVth century and return to the Soviet Union the territory east of the Bug River won from Russia during the rule the of Jagiellonian kings."

This explanation did not sit well at all with the Polish exiles in the Soviet Union, as the majority of them hailed from the eastern parts of Poland where they had businesses, farms and land holdings. Even the Poles from the other parts of the country could not bear the thought that Lwow and Wilno would become Russian cities. In their political articles both newspapers slandered the members of the Polish Government in London calling them "traitors," "fascists" and "Hitler's flunkies." It was absolutely beyond our comprehension that Arciszewski, Kwapinski, Pragier and the other leaders of the Polish Socialist Party were "fascists," or that Gen. Sikorski, his closest military coworkers, and Mikolajczyk, a leader of the Polish Peasant Party, were "Hitler's flunkies."

Two days later Steve, Maks and I were ready to leave for our work in the forest. That morning Andrey Travin, a Chuvash who had pusy eyes from chronic trachoma, which he wiped constantly with a dirty kerchief, pulled up in front of our cabin. We loaded our bundles containing some clothes and some small sacks with provisions on the wagon and started on our way. We passed through Chuvash villages located here and there on the plain, talked, joked and smoked cigarettes, which were rolled in pieces of newspaper. Travin was a nice fellow, who was interested in learning about life in Poland, particularly about the lot of the Polish peasants. He was openly envious of their having individual farms, rather than working for collectives. We stopped for dinner in a Tatar village. Andrey would have preferred to stop in a Chuvash one, but we conspired against his wishes to stop where we did. The Chuvashes were awfully dirty, and it would have been very easy to contract trachoma. One only had to touch anything with one's hand: a table, a chair or a spoon, and than rub one's eye which just happened to itch and infection was certain. Tatars, on the other hand, were very clean. We selected a cabin near a well so that it would be easy to water our horse. Andrey loosened the horse's harness, gave it some hay and went inside with us. In Tatar he asked the woman to boil some potatoes and sell us some sour milk (which tasted much like buttermilk but had a much thicker consistency).

While the potatoes were boiling I looked around the room. It was very clean. The walls and the stove were obviously freshly whitewashed, anything made of wood like the floor, window frames and sills as well as doors were cleanly scraped with a special knife called *kosyr*. Half of the room was taken up by a bed which also served as a table. An old Tatar sat cross-legged on the bed. He had a small colorfully embroidered cap called a *tyubetayka* on his head, eyeglasses in wire frames on the tip of his nose and a book in his lap. The woman, who turned out to be the old man's daughter-in-law was young and good looking with two long black braids. Red ribbons with silver coins hanging on them were pleated into the

ends of the braids. When the woman moved around the coins jingled pleasantly.

Andrey paid for the potatoes and milk from the collective farm's money and after watering the horse we started on our way, arriving at our destination at 4 p.m. The office of the *Lespromkhoz* was already closed and Andrey had to remain with us for the night. It took quite a bit of effort to find the office manager who showed Andrey a stable where he could put the horse and then took the three of us to the building where we would live for the next 14 days. Our collective farm provided us with provisions for seven days only, the chairman promised to send the remainder after a week. We refused to live in the same hall with the Chuvashs and Tatars because it was filthy and stuffy. Consequently, the office manager led us into the next building which served as a school during the rest of the year and we made our sleeping quarters in one of the empty classrooms that did not have school benches. The room had two windows and a table between them with a bench next to it. We dumped our bundles and jackets on the floor and stretched out to rest. Andrey went to visit with our "neighbors," the Chuvashs. All of a sudden the door flew open and a young Russian woman about 30 years old with a white kerchief on her head and a Tatar girl in tow burst into the room. We jumped to our feet. "Undress!" the woman ordered. The three of us just stood there dumfounded. "Get undressed!" She repeated. "Have you got any lice?!" At this point we recovered and started pulling out our shirts. Now the woman realized she had exaggerated a bit, so just looked casually at our shirts, said goodbye and left. "I'll be seeing you again!" She remarked turning back to us from the door.

We stuck our shirts back into our trousers and went outside. Two men happened to be sitting on the steps leading to our building. They seemed totally out of place in those surroundings. They looked neither like forestry workers nor like permanent inhabitants of the *Lespromkhoz* but like Jewish cobblers from a small Polish town. As soon as we walked down the steps one of them approached Maks and spoke in Yiddish. My suspicions proved correct when they started talking about themselves. Both hailed from Ostrow Mazowiecki, a small town not far from Warsaw. Indeed they were cobblers and in 1939 when they had found themselves in the territories occupied by the Red Army, both had volutarily signed up for work in the interior of the Soviet Union. They left accompanied by their families and were assigned to this particular *Lespromkhoz* where they operated the cobbler shop. One was the father and the other one was his son. Soon the whole family came to greet their compatriots from Poland. The family included the mother and a daughter who was married to a tailor. The tailor was so utterly stupid that probably on account of his stupidity even the Red Army found him unsuitable for service. There was another daughter, the youngest, Sonyechka. She was 16 years old and worked as a junior clerk in the *Lespromkhoz* office. Although both daughters were pretty, Sonyechka was much prettier than her older sister and had a lot of personal charm. She used to visit us every day and seemed to truly enjoy making supper for us. Sonyechka was a typical teenager happy that at this point in her life she had met three young men at once and not just one. To us she was simply a likable "little girl." After all we were eight years older than she.

Andrey came over and remarked: "Well, you have even found your people so you'll not be lonely. I am going to sleep." Then he went inside. As we continued sitting on the steps and puffing on our cigarettes, two women approached us. One of them we recognized as the Russian who had burst into our room ordering us to undress. Now she started a conversation by asking us how we had settled in and apologizing for her incursion earlier that day. We introduced ourselves and she introduced us to her sister-in-law. Both women were from Riga (Latvia) and had been evacuated to the *Lespromkhoz* at the beginning of the German-Soviet hostilities. Raisa Markovna was employed as a physician's assistant (feldsher) and lived with her child and mother-in-law. Her husband, an engineer and the manager of a plant, had been evacuated with the plant to Fergana in Central Asia where the plant was presently operating. Raisa Markovna was in the process of trying to join her husband. Her sister-in-law (the husband's sister), Maria Grigoryevna, lived with another younger sister, Luba. Neither worked. Maria Grigoryevna was older than her sister-in-law and her husband was an officer in the Latvian Division of the Red Army. Until late that evening the five of us reminisced about the good old days, sharing jokes about the Soviet Union and hoping for the end of the Soviet rule. My mother used to have family in Riga, and one of the cousins had been exiled to Siberia with a small daughter after the Soviet occupation of Latvia, so we even had mutual acquaintances.

The next morning before 8 o'clock we reported to the office. Andrey had already loaded his wagon

with the bast and paid for it. He took us to the forest foreman and said goodbye. The foreman led us into the forest, assigned a parcel of land to us where we were to work and explained the work itself which was neither hard nor difficult. We were to select only linden trees. After felling a tree and cutting off its branches, the trunk was sawn into five-meter pieces. Then the bark was sliced lengthwise by means of an ax and pounded with the back of the ax. After this treatment and using the ax as well as a wooden stick the bark with the bast was loosened from the wood inside it. Now the "skin" had to be pulled off the trunk and this was the trickiest and funniest part of the whole procedure. Both the bast and the trunk were extremely slippery so either the trunk spun inside the bark envelope like an axle in a ball bearing, or it refused to come out despite spreading the edges of the bark, or it jumped out of the "bark pipe" at the most unexpected moment and usually one of us got hit by the trunk. We put the empty bark pipes in a pile and a foreman calculated the weight of the dry bast from the volume of fallen trees using special tables. Our work ended at this stage. In the subsequent production stages the bark pipes were ferried to a small lake in the middle of the forest and dumped into it. In the water they were arranged in a raft-like fashion and weighed down with tree trunks. After a six-week soak the bark pipes were pulled out of water. Now the bark was easily removed from the bast, the latter dried in air and stored in the *Lespromkhoz* warehouses.

Working with linden trees was not difficult because the wood itself was very soft, consequently, sawing it as well as removing the branches was accomplished without much effort. Nevertheless, one had to have decent tools. In our case the saw brought from our collective farm was so dull it would probably not have cut through butter. The axes were just as dull and on top of everything they used to fall off of the handles. We remedied this latter problem during our first day in the forest, but had to struggle with our saw all that day. Only after returning from work that evening did Steve manage to sharpen it somewhat using a dull file that we had brought with us. That evening we again sat outside gabbing.

And so our days passed one after another. At work we were bothered and mercilessly bitten by horseflies while at night the mosquitoes buzzed and stung us. Two days after our arrival at the *Lespromkhoz* an outdoor mess was organized in the forest. At 11 o'clock the cook started boiling water in a big kettle. Shortly before noon she dumped a certain amount of rye flour into the kettle. The dinner break was from noon until 1:00 p.m. and when the workers came around, the soup was ready. It sold for 35 kopecks a bowl. Of course, one had to bring one's own bowl and the water was not always boiled because sometimes the firewood was damp and, therefore, the fire was weak. The soup tasted like bookbinder's glue but the Chuvash and Tatar workers enjoyed it tremendously. And no wonder! In many of the collective farms in our district and particularly in those neighboring on the forests the crops were so poor that there was insufficient grain or flour for any distribution to the farmers. People ate pancakes made out of ground dried grass and soup made out of boiled nettle. On Sunday we did not work but wandered through the settlement with the two women from Riga and with Sonyechka.

A few days later we were transferred to the lake to dump bark pipes into the water. There was a lot of stripped bark in the forest waiting to be ferried to the lake. Because the *Lespromkhoz* had only a few wagons, the bark just rotted on the ground. On the seventh day our provisions began to run out but nobody arrived from our collective farm to bring more. We decided to wait another day and, if nobody arrived, we would return to Sergeyevka. The next morning we went to the office and announced that we would not go to work because we had no food and that if nobody from Sergeyevka arrived that day, the next morning we would be heading home. Nobody arrived, and the next morning we said goodbye to our acquaintances and started on our way. The trek home was longer than from Sergeyevka to Koshki but we hoped to encounter a wagon so that we could at least put our bundles in it. We were out of luck and returned home dead tired, but before darkness fell.

At home everybody was nervous and excited. Come to think of it, during those six years of our exile in the Soviet Union there has never been a day without some reason for nervousness, excitement or uncertainty about the future. This time the cause was the Indom. The militia had received numerous complaints about burglaries in and around Sergeyevka. In Little Sergeyevka a twenty-liter can with milk was stolen and the empty can was subsequently recovered from a little pond near the Indom. Several geese, a sheep and a bucket with sour milk had disappeared in the neighboring Chuvash village. These burglaries were linked (and rightly so!) to the Easter Feast for the children in the Indom. Consequently all

of the older boys as well as Jozef, "the American" and pani Justynka were arrested. The investigation lasted two weeks during which the suspects were imprisoned. The Indom director used his influence and had the boys released from prison but made Jozek and pani Justynka the scapegoats, because they did not have Soviet passports, so the burglaries were labeled "sabotage and activity detrimental to the socialist state." Pani Justynka managed very well in prison by telling fortunes to her cell mates and behaving shrewdly during her interrogation. The boys were, of course, beaten up and kicked by the guards, but only Jozek had to stand trial and was sentenced to a year in a prison camp.

Then two changes took place in the life of our family. First Tanya and her little daughter moved out of our room and into the apartment next to the *Sel'po* store. Then we and Leah, whom the new director had expelled from the Indom as a non-invalid, bought a small field with potato plants on it from the farm's agriculturist who was moving to another district. As there was also millet planted on that parcel of land in addition to potatoes, my uncle, Lea and her mother used to weed it. However, the old woman pulled out the millet plants together with weeds, and consequently, she was "transferred" from weeding to watching Yurek, Lea's little son, so that he would not get into mischief.

One day the chairman of the *Raipotrebsoyuz* and my uncle's acquaintance, Ivan Pavlovich, arrived to inspect our *Sel'po*. In spite of the fact that now my uncle was just a plain citizen, and not the director of the Home for Polish Invalids anymore and, furthermore, that he was looked upon unfavorably by the authorities, Ivan Pavlovich paid him a visit and the two of them had a nice talk over some vodka. Later Lisa, the millers' daughter-in-law told us that Ivan Pavlovich spoke very highly of my uncle.

It was the beginning of July 1943, the haymaking had started and Steve, Maks and I were working at stacking hay. Every morning my uncle went to the post office and read the daily papers. When the July 6th newspapers arrived we found out about the tragic death of Gen. Sikorski and his Chief of Staff, Gen. Klimecki, in a plane crash off of Gibraltar. The accident looked awfully suspicious to us, and we discussed it in our family circle. Initially we attributed the crash to the work of Soviet agents whose motive was to deprive the Poles of leadership and thereby deliver the nation into the hands of Soviet puppets. By encouraging contacts between the Union of Polish Patriots and the loose guerrilla units the whole action was given an air of "Polishness" and legitimacy. Although the postwar political system in Poland proved that the Soviets achieved their goal, Gen. Sikorski's death was not their deed. However, in view of the frictions within the Polish emigree circles in London and the well-known hostility of the last prewar governing circles in Poland toward Gen. Sikorski, one could suspect them of wishing to get rid of the General. Then there were the British, who were also very much interested in getting rid of General Sikorski, because of his rather reserved if not uncompromising attitude toward many of the Soviet demands. Finally, one could not discount the possibility of an ordinary air crash like the thousands of others which occur without any underlying political motives.

At any rate the untimely and tragic death of Gen. Sikorski was reflected in the official reactions. *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* printed large laudatory articles about the General's life and activities, and did not fail to mention that he had fallen under the influence of "Polish fascists and had become the victim of political intrigue." The "Free Poland" and the "New Horizons," newspapers published by the Union of Polish Patriots, echoed their masters, the Soviet leading papers. For the Polish exiles in the Soviet Union the death of Gen. Sikorski was a terrible blow but not many realized the true meaning of it. In fact, the hope for an independent Poland aligned with and influenced by the western world died with the General. On July 4, 1943, Poland's fate was sealed. It became a lackey of the Soviet Union.

Back To the Collective Farmer's Life

Dispirited and with many questions about the future crowding our minds Steve, Maks and I started working at haymaking. Haystacking, although hard work, was at least healthy, because it was outdoors. We worked from sunrise to sunset with a three hour dinner break from noon until 3 p.m. Actually we had to start one to two hours after sunrise because the hay was covered with dew and had to dry before being stacked. Consequently, we worked until dusk. We rode on a wagon with ladder sides to and from work. The only true collective farmer in our brigade was Andrey Travin who shaped the actual haystacks.

In addition to the three of us and Andrey there were also five women. All had been evacuated from the northern parts of the Soviet Union. One hailed from Petrozavodsk. She had had a Chinese husband who had disappeared somewhere, and now she lived in Sergeyevka with a seven-year son, Kolka, whose features distinctly reflected the mix of the two races. Two women were from Leningrad. One, the widow of a Hero of the Soviet Union, decorated with six medals for valor and killed in the Finnish-Russian war in 1940, lived in Sergeyevka with two mentally retarded daughters. The other one, whose husband had starved to death during the siege of Leningrad, used to be employed in the Putilov Machine Works. The two remaining women were from collective farms in the Leningrad Province. In the meadow there was also a brigade of teenagers who put the hay into big piles after it had been raked into rows by a horse-drawn rake operated by David Goldberg. His older brother, Izrael, worked on a horse-drawn mower. As a Jew, he had not been drafted into the Polish army now being mustered, although, theoretically, no anti-Semitism existed in the Soviet Union.

The piles of hay from all over the meadow were then pulled up to a wagon with ladder sides which was parked near the haystack being built. Seven-year old boys used to put a rope under a hay pile, attach the rope to a horse and drag the pile to the wagon. Steve, Maks and I stood on the ground with pitchforks and lifted the hay (frequently a whole pile) to the women on the wagon. They in turn handed the hay to the women working with Andrey on the haystack. When the hay piles were brought in from close by we had to work fast but as the distance increased, the work was not so tiring. On the other hand the women on the wagon were frequently close to tears when they could not keep up with the three of us. We took a break from time to time in order to have a smoke and let the women and the horses rest. Andrey smoked a lot and during a break had to have two cigarettes which was OK with us because it prolonged our rest periods. Being together all day long we talked constantly. The two subjects of our conversations never changed: the life before the war and food. The overseer of all of the field work and especially of the haymaking, which was the most important job at that particular time, was Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich, the deputy chairman of the collective farm. Because of his devotion to farm work he was referred to by the members of the collective as *serdtse kolkhoza* (the heart of the collective farm).

Stepan Fyodorovich's devotion to farming had absolutely nothing to do with patriotism. Like all Russian peasants he hated the collective farms and detested the Soviet regime. He worked because he was, what one might call today "a breadaholic" (analogous to "workaholic") and because he had in his blood a love for farming which was developed over hundreds of generations. Uncle Stepan was a Chuvash. He was six feet tall and despite his 59 years was as strong as an ox and had not a single grey hair. Whenever Uncle Stepan came to check on our work, he would tell Steve and Maks to rest, because they were shorter than he or I and taking the place of the two of them he would say: "Let's tire out the girls!" He threw piles of hay through the air as if they were basketballs. The women on top of the wagon threatened to quit and come down. "OK! Just try!" Uncle Stepan would answer laughing. The piles of hay were flying so fast that there was no possible time for the women to come down. They just had to move it up or be buried under it. After such strenuous work Stepan Fyodorovich would order *perekur*, time out for a smoke. We would leave our posts and move away from the haystack so as not to accidentally set it on fire. We stretched out on the ground, everybody cleared a 4 x 4 inch piece free of grass to serve as an "ashtray" and Uncle Stepan took out of a pocket his inseparable pipe. All Chuvash men as well as women, smoked pipes but Stepan Fyodorovich was unique probably in the whole area. All day long he held the pipe in his mouth and frequently we kidded him that he must sleep with it in his mouth. He just laughed and used to say to me: "Mike! And you? Do you sleep with your eyeglasses on?!"

Stepan Fyodorovich had worked in our collective farm when it was still operated by the local Germans and with admiration bordering on worship used to talk about those times. The harvests were so

big that the farmers earned 13 pounds of grain per "workday" (not to be confused with a "day's work"). "I was in the field thrashing and the grain I earned was just ferried straight from the field to my home. *Moy slepoy chort* ('my blind devil') had to look for a place to pile up that grain. Even now the two of us still survive thanks to German bread. Otherwise we would have starved to death long time ago." No wonder Stepan Fyodorovich still had German grain. He lived with his wife who was almost blind from trachoma and for that reason he referred to her as the "blind devil." They had one daughter who lived somewhere near Salavan. All of their other children had died young and all of his brothers were at the front. Uncle Stepan lived in one of the biggest houses in the village with a yard and a beautiful garden. Just like the miller he had the best cow, the most beautiful fattest sheep and a pig. The home, the garden and the animals were kept in an excellent condition and no wonder someone once referred to Uncle Stepan as a "Soviet landlord." Later when Sergey Stepanovich, the chairman of the collective farm, established his domicile in Sergeyevka and the district dignitaries used to visit him on inspection tours or just for bribes, that nickname was switched to the chairman.

The farmers feared Uncle Stepan more than either the chairman of the collective farm or Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor. He used to show up when and where he was least expected. For example, during haymaking he would suddenly step out from behind the nearest haystack shouting regardless of whether or not there was any reason for berating the workers. Nobody ever noticed him in spite of the fact that there were people standing on the top of a haystack who had a view of the entire field. They were never able to warn the others about Uncle Stepan's approach. Actually we all worked very diligently even without being warned of the approach of Stepan Fyodorovich. A warning would make us work even harder just to avoid being yelled at by him. But no efforts on our part had any effect on Uncle Stepan's behavior.

Before dark Roza Kalman drove up with the head foreman, Uncle Misha. Roza worked as the record keeper (*uchotchik*), and she kept records of the earned workdays (*trudodni*) and of the daily work. She got that job thanks to her friends in the district committee of the Young Communist League, the *Komsomol*, and it was the committee that told the chairman of our collective farm to hire her as the record keeper. Roza's political and personal reputation had been tarnished by her affair with Stephen. She managed to regain her political reputation but not her moral reputation when her lover, Stefan, vanished from the district. Rumor had it that Roza was pregnant. Someone had seen her and Stefan last spring making love on the steps of the *Sel'po* store. The main source of this revelation was Aunt Masha, the miller's wife, who could not forget Nina's having been sent for work to Stalingrad and Roza's "contribution" to it. The women discussed with obvious expertise Roza's looks and figure but neither Steve nor I felt competent to pass any judgement, because in the Soviet Union at that time women did not own any girdles or corsets, and to us they all looked pregnant. Maks sided with the women because for some personal reason unknown to us he disliked Roza. When she showed up in the field after having been sick for a few days, he and the women exchanged appropriate remarks. As soon as Roza's little carriage was spotted in the distance, people standing up on the haystack signaled down to us: "The Jewess is coming!"

Roza was the assistant of the farm's foreman, Uncle Misha, who tolerated her only because she was his right hand in possibly the truest meaning of that expression; Uncle Misha was totally illiterate. He was an excellent work organizer and a powerful speaker at the collective farm's meetings. In his heyday he must have been an outstanding worker. Uncle Misha had a rich and colorful past. He had worked as a longshoreman on the Volga River, then on the railroads in Tashkent. From there he moved to a cotton growing collective farm somewhere in the south of the Soviet Union and advanced from an ordinary farm worker to a foreman. Subsequently he returned to his village in one of the districts within the Kuibyshev province and was then assigned to our village. Soon after his arrival in Sergeyevka Uncle Misha was drafted for the "Work Front" from which he was discharged after a few months on account of a bilateral inguinal hernia. The hernia did not prevent him, however, from challenging us whenever he showed up at our group, and one had to admit that he was unusually strong.

Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich and Uncle Misha hated each other. The reason for that hatred has never been clear, however, nationality differences must have been a big factor. Uncle Stepan was a Chuvash whereas Uncle Misha was a Mordvin. The latter's family consisted of two little boys, an adult son Vaska, a tractor driver, and a wife, who was a tall skinny woman suffering from a lung condition. Aunt Masha, the miller's wife, named her "The Windmill" which most appropriately described the woman. Uncle

Misha's wife liked my uncle and used to visit us to share her problems with him, and there were many. Uncle Misha carried on an affair with an evacuee woman and every bit of the flour received from the collective farm for his work was exchanged for vodka. Consequently, the whole family was dressed in rags and when Uncle Misha got drunk he vented his anger on his poor wife by beating her up. Once he even pushed the metal comb she had in her hair into her head.

Steve and I treated Roza as an acquaintance and not as a supervisor. Some evenings we went to the Kalmans just for a chat. Although our political views differed widely, we could always find an interesting topic of conversation because the Kalmans were from a big city like the two of us. Maks, on the other hand, could not stand Roza "physically and spiritually," as he used to say. Nevertheless, he visited the Kalmans every evening claiming that Roza's mother liked him very much and insisted on his coming. I did not notice it and neither did Steve. Just the opposite, Mrs. Kalman complained to us that Maks behaved rudely toward Roza.

On Sundays we did not work although it was a working day for the collective farm. We won this privilege from Sergey Stepanovich, who did not want to force us to work or even use threats, because in the eyes of the authorities we were foreigners (not having Soviet passports) and, consequently, not subject to Soviet law. We felt that a human being must have one day a week for a rest, a thorough washing up and helping in the family garden. The rest was extremely important even though at that time we were still eating relatively well and were not undernourished or hungry. However, the work was very tiring. The first ten days at haymaking, until our bodies and muscles got used to the "exercise," were more like torture than like work. The suffering did not seem to occur during the day at work but started the moment we went to sleep. The small of the back and the back muscles were so painful that just lying down was an effort while trying to fall asleep and getting up the next morning was sheer agony. In addition, we had blisters on our hands from holding the pitchfork. They turned into calluses in a relatively short time, then our backs stopped hurting and our biceps hardened like steel.

Because the nights were very hot, both Steve and I slept in the attic. At that time, in July, the evenings were very long and the nights were not completely dark. Consequently we used to go to sleep after eleven o'clock, because after returning from the fields shortly before nine o'clock we ate supper. We used to get up at four o'clock in the morning. Actually we worked from five in the morning until noon and from three o'clock in the afternoon until eight thirty in the evening, a total of twelve and one-half hours.

Once a week on Sundays was the "Bath Day." On hot days the ritual was performed in a muddy and dirty pond not far from us where the horses and cattle also had their baths. The men brought soap, a brush and towels with them and scrubbed each other. Sometimes my uncle came with my cousin Kathy and washed her up at a distance. My aunt, who was prone to colds, used to bathe in the house. In the wintertime we were also forced to resort to that rather unsatisfactory experience of "bathing" at home. A gallon pot of water was heated over straw and pieces of tree branches in order to spare the other fuel. Then we washed up in an old rusty basin 20 inches in diameter and so full of holes that no soldering was possible, so the holes were plugged up with pieces of rags. Instead of using cold water, we heated snow in the winter and rain water in the fall and spring, because the water from the well was too hard and the soap did not lather. Naturally this kind of bathing was hardly satisfactory for proper personal hygiene but it helped a bit. Unfortunately, we were never able to get used to the Russian bath, which was a room full of hot steam. Aunt Masha, the miller's wife, used to invite us from time to time to their bath house located near their cabin but only my aunt used to go there and only very infrequently.

Another Sunday activity was gardening. In the beginning we had to weed the potatoes and millet as well as water the cucumbers. Then it was necessary to make little mounds around each potato plant and pinch the flowers and small leaves of tobacco plants which would make the tobacco stronger. Finally the potatoes had to be dug out and the tobacco plants cut. We had no problem with the millet because its roots had been eaten by grubs so we traded the straw with Aunt Masha for a kilogram (2 pounds) of groats.

Despite Nina's departure for Stalingrad we continued to visit the windmill every Sunday so that Aunt Masha and Uncle Peter would not feel so lonely. One Sunday when Steve went to the market or to one of the villages, and I paid my usual visit to the mill, I encountered a visitor. He turned out to be Ivan, the

millers' older son and a major in the Red Army, who had arrived unexpectedly on furlough from the front. Small wonder the millers, particularly Aunt Masha, were happy beyond description. They had not seen him for almost three years because in 1940 Ivan had been stationed Bialystok, in occupied Poland, where Liza had joined him. Before the outbreak of the German-Russian war on June 22, 1941, Liza had left for Sergeyevka to spend the summer with her in-laws. After the hostilities broke out there was no news from Ivan for almost a year. Finally a letter did arrive. It turned out that when the Red Army was retreating under the German onslaught, a Red Army group found itself encircled by Germans. Since the German armies were moving rapidly toward Moscow, that Red Army group still encircled moved in the same direction in order to join the retreating Red Army. Ivan was wounded in the arm and hip and walked from Bialystok almost to the gates of Moscow on foot. Only in December 1941, when the Germans began retreating from Moscow, did Ivan and his Red Army group break out of the encirclement. After recuperating from his wounds in a Moscow hospital, Ivan was decorated with the Order of the Red Star, promoted to a major and assigned to the staff of Marshal Zhukov as a reporter for one of the central newspapers. Subsequently he was transferred to the staff of Marshal Rokossovsky. By training Ivan was a journalist who had graduated from the School of Journalism in Kuibyshev. Since he was fluent in spoken and written German, he also served as an interpreter for military intelligence. While in the School of Journalism Ivan picked up a smattering of English. I found out all of this information during that Sunday visit.

The major was of medium height, blond and his features resembled those of Aunt Masha and Nina. He was definitely more handsome. He had beautiful nonmasculine hands and a very pleasant voice. He did not look his age and although he was two years younger than Liza the difference in their ages seemed greater. Ivan brought with him some canned meat which had been sent by the United States for the Red Army. He bluntly stated that it was the only assistance from the Allies. He spoke very critically about England and the United States, criticized the delaying of the second front in Europe, spoke very unkindly about the Polish Government-in-Exile and about the deceased Gen. Sikorski. On the whole Ivan's opinions reflected articles from *Pravda*, *Izvestiya* or *Sputnik Agitatora* (Propagandist's Companion). I left breathing a sigh of relief, and Aunt Masha who accompanied me a few steps toward our cabin said, (as if apologizing for her son's behavior): "Ivan is always like that. He is on good terms with his father only the first day. Then they start discussing politics and jump at each other's throats. After all, you know Ivan is a Party member." Aunt Masha had sensed that I was not favorably impressed with Ivan. He was a narrow-minded, conceited and bigoted Bolshevik. His narrow-mindedness was reflected even more in his reaction to the rumors about his wife, Liza. The rumors about wild drinking parties and orgies with Tanya, the saleswoman from our store, Volodya ("Soap Bubble") and a 62-year old *Sel'po* salesman in one of the neighboring villages, and the source of these rumors was none other than our landlady, Aunt Styosha. Although she was a well-known gossip in our village, Ivan went to her to find out about his wife's behavior. Of course, Aunt Styosha denied everything.

The haymaking ended, the harvest started, and we were assigned to stacking sheaves of wheat. Now our supervisor was Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich and the three of us were joined by Waclaw, a lame invalid, who had received a three-month certificate instead of a Soviet passport but had not been readmitted to the Indom because the new director did not think much of him. Waclaw moved in with pani Maria, who used to cook for us in the Home, and now lived with a Chuvash family. One day she confessed to my aunt that she was pregnant. All of her better dresses and other clothing had been bartered for food supplies which had begun to run out, and Waclaw decided to start working on the collective farm. By now Steve, Maks and I were used to the hard work of stacking sheaves whereas Waclaw had to start getting into it. Under the watchful eye of Uncle Stepan, the work was even more difficult for a novice. Furthermore, Waclaw was hampered by his lameness. Although after the amputation of the part of his foot in the camps the wound did heal, he did not feel quite steady standing on it. He had a particular difficulty standing on a soft base such as a wagon loaded with sheaves. Because of his handicap Waclaw frequently fell holding the sheaf on the pitchfork just as he was handing the sheaf to the person on the stack or even if he was just holding the empty pitchfork. This prompted gales of laughter from the other workers and Uncle Stepan usually made some witty remark which made us laugh even harder. Waclaw laughed with the rest of us, because we did not make fun of his lameness but instead laughed at the overall situation. In spite of the fact that Waclaw had lived in the Soviet Union for almost four years, he had hardly learned any Russian language. The few words Waclaw managed to pick up he mispronounced in such a funny way that even the Chuvashes working with us, who truly butchered the

language, found it amusing. Uncle Stepan used to kid him about it good-naturedly saying that Waclaw was probably a Tatar and not a Pole. Considering the fact that every sheaf weighed 65-85 pounds and had to be handed up approximately twelve feet from the wagon to the stack, that we unloaded up to fifty wagons and that a wagon yielded close to 220 pounds of grain, each person handled the weight of 22,000 pounds (not counting the weight of the straw) during a day's shift. When the threshing started we were able to confirm our calculations. A threshing machine yielded 18,000-22,000 pounds of grain daily and only two people transferred the sheaves from the wagon to the thresher.

Actually the threshing started almost simultaneously with the sheaf stacking, maybe just a few days later. Threshing was the most important work on a collective farm during the harvest time and required a larger number of workers than any other job. Anywhere between 22 and 25 adults and teenagers worked around a threshing machine. That number did not include the children ferrying the sheaves from the fields or the brigade of carters who hauled the grain to the elevator at the Pogruznaya train station.

Threshing required so many people because it was not completely automated. The four of us; i.e. Steve, Maks, Waclaw and I, transferred sheaves from the wagon or from a stack to the threshing machine. The proper arrangement of the sheaves on the "table" and the cutting of their bindings was the responsibility of three women and one man who actually fed the untied sheaves into the machine. Consequently, automation was limited to the actual act of threshing.

The grain together with the chaff fell into a big box at the side of the thresher from which it was transferred by hand carried buckets to a nearby winnowing machine. Then the grain was carried in buckets to a weighing scale and placed in 100-pound sacks. The straw, which came out at the other side of the thresher, was dragged away in a special netting drawn by two horses and piled up in a stack somewhere in the middle of the field. This task required several women for stacking, 3-4 horses because one was needed to drag the netting back to the threshing machine and two boys to lead the horses. The mixture of straw, chaff and grain ears which fell under the thresher was pushed out by little girls using inverted rakes and piled up into another stack. The threshing machine was powered by the engine of a small tractor. When the sheaves contained a lot of straw and the women working at the stacking of straw became overwhelmed, it was necessary to stop the thresher. Sometimes the tractor broke down, or the belt leading from it to the threshing machine, or one of the belts on the machine itself tore. Then the work also had to be stopped and everybody welcomed the unexpected respite.

However, that particular summer the threshing machine did not break down a single time. Finally, the collective farm had found a capable mechanic, one of the best in the surrounding area. He was Uncle Semyon, an old, partially deaf, quiet Mordvin. We never heard Uncle Semyon get mad or shout. Every morning upon arriving at work he oiled the machine and checked all of the belts. As soon as the machine started working he lay in the shadows, in a burrow which was created by removing a few sheaves from between the stack and the threshing machine. If the machine stopped during the day, he was awaked. The old man crawled out of his burrow all dirty and covered with dust and straw, fixed whatever had to be done and went back to sleep. Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich told us during one of our chats that the mechanic, as well as his brothers, used to be very rich peasants, *kulaks*. During the collectivization in 1929-1930 the state took everything away from them and they were sent to prison camps. Uncle Semyon returned after several years and began struggling to make a living and to help the rest of his family. A second brother died in exile and the oldest, from whom letters rarely arrived, returned only after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, after eleven years in exile.

Now we worked even more and harder than usual and the workers took turns going home only twice a week, spending the rest of the time in the field threshing, day and night. The only break and rest we had was when the machine temporarily broke down or at dawn when it was stopped for 1-2 hours to let the workers take a snooze. They dropped down right where they were working and immediately fell asleep. After two hours the racket of the tractor's engine and of the threshing machine, accompanied by Uncle Misha's wild screams: "Let's go! Let's go!" and Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich's: "*Utar! Utar!*" ("hurry up" in the Chuvash language), which would probably raise a dead person from the grave, got the people back to work. They got up dazed, dirty and tired wishing only for one thing "that something would break down." Rarely would "something break down," and we continued to thresh.

None of the four of us worked at night. I used to end my work day right after sunset explaining that I suffered from night blindness and could not see anything when dusk set in. There were a few cases of night blindness in the village and the fact that I wore glasses made my excuse perfectly acceptable. Steve, Maks and Waclaw worked until late in the evening and also returned to their homes for the night. Our collective farm's authorities were extremely satisfied with our work and from time to time each one of us was given a pint of skim milk or on rare occasions buttermilk. In the morning before leaving for work we had breakfast at home. It consisted of two pieces of bread and a glass of skim milk. Each of us took to work a container and a spoon because dinner was served in the field. It consisted of potato soup with giant noodles floating in it. The dinner time was very short; just sufficient for the "straw boy" to take the horses to the farm's stable and exchange them for rested ones. When he returned we started working. Every morning and evening the workers received a pint of skim milk and 250 grams ($\frac{1}{2}$ pound) of bread. While the Chuvash workers brought food from their homes, there were many evacuees whose only food was the quart of skim milk and the 500 grams of bread a day, because there was nothing to eat at home.

At our home there were the usual problems. The director of the Indom was spreading rumors that we were thieves, swindlers and bandits. He also stated that if any of the invalids or the orphans kept any contact with us, they would be expelled from the Home. My little cousin was told by the director to leave the premises when she went to visit a sick girlfriend. The director was aptly assisted by the Orthodox Father Oszmianski in spreading these vicious rumors. Father Oszmianski was now full of vigor and a manager of the Indom's household, whereas during the Embassy's administration of the Home he was a sick, infirm old man. Now he worked all day in the field that belonged to the Indom and in the evening he visited the neighboring Chuvash villages, where he used to say mass, baptize children and carry out other religious practices. These activities provided him with quite a significant income in money and food products. One of Father Oszmianski's other important sources of income was derived from the sale of empty boxes from matzos. As I have already mentioned, the last transport with the clothing and food brought by my uncle and Maks from the Polish Embassy contained a tremendous supply of Manischewitz matzos. That supply was so large that the invalids were still given matzos even though six months had passed since the arrival of that transport. Father Oszmianski collected the empty boxes and sold them to the Chuvashes as being blessed by him. Despite the priest's anti-Semitism and firm belief in "ritual murder," he did not scorn the money that he had earned from the sale of the empty matzos boxes obviously believing just as firmly that *pecunia non olet*, ("Money doesn't stink," a statement attributed to one of the Roman emperors who taxed the public toilets in ancient Rome).

There were rumors in the village that Father Oszmianski's secret quarters were in one of the cabins where a former nun lived. When the priest began spending his nights outside the Indom, the talk about this "holy affair" left the rumor stage and came out into the open. One day Steve and I went to buy some buttermilk. We entered a small cabin off of the main street in our village. It looked neat on the outside but the inside of the cabin exceeded our wildest expectations. The walls and the floor were almost white from having been thoroughly scrubbed, a most unusual occurrence in a Chuvash home. We decided to buy the milk in that cabin because it was so clean. The two Chuvash women occupying the cabin also looked extremely clean. We sat down on a bench and engaged in small talk while one of the women went into the cellar to get the milk. We started our conversation in the usual manner inquiring about the sons, whether or not they were writing from the front, were they alive, how old were the two women, etc. It turned out that both were over sixty years old and one was a childless widow. "Is your husband alive?" Steve asked the other woman who just brought the vessel with buttermilk from the cellar. "I do not have a husband. I am a *devushka*." She answered. Steve looked at me and we could hardly stifle our smiles. When translated into Polish *devushka* means "little girl." Some "little girl" over sixty years old! Probably what she meant to say was "maiden." When we visited the windmill on Sunday and told Aunt Masha about our experience, she explained that the "little girl" was the former nun and that we had stumbled into Father Oszmianski's hideaway.

The threshing was in full swing and that year's harvest was extremely good, so we worked day and night. The newspapers were full of news about the collapse of the German offensive on the front between the cities of Kursk and Belgorod which was what became to be known as the "Kursk Salient."

For the fourth anniversary of the German attack on Poland in 1939, on September 1 Steve, Maks and I spread the word among the Poles that it would be nice to commemorate the anniversary and to do

so by working, thus indirectly helping the soldiers in their fight against our common enemy. Our idea met with an overwhelming response among the Polish population in our village. It was a clear night between August 31 and September 1 when the only workers threshing in the light of a full moon were Poles. Only three Russians were on duty that night: Uncle Misha, the foreman, Uncle Semyon, the mechanic and the tractor driver Witya, Aunt Styosha's son. Even old Mrs. Kowalska, Mrs. Zelmanska and a few boys from Indom came to help. We worked all night with no break, singing Polish songs, laughing and joking. When Uncle Misha gave the order for the threshing machine to stop at five o'clock in the morning and added up the amount of grain processed, it turned out that we had threshed 22,000 pounds. Uncle Misha was in seventh heaven and we could not have been prouder of our work. I returned home with Steve and Mrs. Kowalska who remarked: "That was a very good idea for us Poles to take over the threshing for the night. I felt like I was helping my Franek." Franek Kowalski had been drafted into the Kilinski Polish Division a few weeks earlier. The new Polish Army in the Soviet Union was gradually being transformed from a single division into a corps and then into an army consisting of four infantry divisions, a tank brigade named after the Defenders of Westerplatte, the Gen. Bem Artillery Regiment, the "Warsaw" Air Squadron and some auxiliary units.

One day in September Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, called Steve, Maks and I into her office. We were surprised at the unexpected summons but did not think the underlying reason was "political," and we proved to be correct. It seemed that our village and two others had purchased a parcel of land in the forest in Salawan in order to secure a supply of firewood for the mayor's office and for the school, and the three of us were to prepare the firewood. The pay was very good. Each of the three collective farms was to credit us with "workdays" and provide food supplies when we worked on their behalf. We were to work five days for a collective. Each provided flour, potatoes, millet groats and butter, and one collective farm even provided honey. Needless to say we left part of the food at home. In addition to the three of us there was to be a farmer with a horse and a wagon whose job it was to transport the prepared firewood from the forest to the road where it would be picked up by wagons supplied by the individual collective farms.

When we established the details with Anna Pavlovna about when we would pick up our food supplies in the individual collective farms and the day of our departure for the forest, the mayor said she also had a confidential task for us. At this point Maks perked up his ears like a pointer hearing the sound of a hunter's buggle. He was in his element with any "confidential task." Ours involved talking to the forester and promising him two pounds of honey for permitting us to take some firewood from another part of the forest (of course, prepared by someone else and not by us) in case too many wagons come at one time and an insufficient load had been prepared by the three of us. In short, thievery and bribery were being suggested by an official who was none other than the village mayor and the secretary of the local Party cell. Maks and Steve promised Anna Pavlovna that they would bribe the forester whom they had known since their work in the Home for Polish Invalids but they warned her in no uncertain terms: "Don't you dare to go back on your promise, Anna Pavlovna, because the forester may be also useful at some future time and you'd better not make us look foolish!" Thus the topic was settled.

On the agreed upon day we picked up our food supplies as well as our tools. That morning the fourth member of our team arrived with a horse and wagon, and we left for the forest. As soon as we were outside of our village we struck up a closer acquaintance with the "fourth musketeer." His name was Hussein, and he was an 80-year old Tatar from a collective farm more distant than our "three employer-farms." We called him *Babay* which is "grandfather" in the Tatar language and he called each one of us *Malay*, "sonny" in that language. *Babay* was a little dried out old man. He saw only with one eye, having completely lost his vision in the other one following an episode with paralysis from which he had otherwise completely recovered. The blind eye was almost out of its socket and made one want to hold up one's hand, because it looked as if any minute the eye might pop out of the socket entirely. On his head *Babay* wore an embroidered Tatar cap and a felt hat over it. It was quite amusing to us to see a man's felt hat in the Soviet Union where every man wore a cap with a visor because a felt hat was considered to be a "bourgeois legacy." However, even the Tatars in villages wore felt hats and I remembered bartering my old navy-blue "Hueckel" from Warsaw in the labor camp settlement for 2 kg (4 pounds) of meat, 1 kg (2½ pounds) of butter and 40 rubles cash. I never expected my wrinkled filthy hat to become a treasure-trove.

It was only 15 km (about 10 miles) to Salavan, but our horse was skin and bones and probably not much younger than *Babay*. So, after fruitless persuasions with a whip and a switch cut from a bush at the side of the road, we resigned ourselves to the leisurely pace of our "Arabian steed." "One won't get very far on collective farm fare," *Babay* remarked sadly. "This poor horse probably curses not only his lot which forces him to work for a collective farm but also the inventor of the collective farm system." The old man continued to complain and we sympathised with him. *Babay* had to support an old paralyzed wife. Although he technically did not have to work because of old age, if he didn't work the collective would have given him only 8 kg (17.5 pounds) of flour a month which was certainly not enough for the two of them to live on.

We were about halfway to Salavan when the criticism of collective farms, of the Soviet system, etc. was over and we started making "business" plans for Salavan. Maks was the most experienced in that area from the times when he used to bring firewood to the Home for Polish Invalids. Because we had a horse and a wagon we could transport hay at night from the fields to people's homes or sell them the firewood stolen from the forest at night. A wagon of firewood could be sold for 200-250 *rubles* now and for twice as much in the wintertime. *Babay* became enthusiastic about the idea (I think Tatars have a well-developed business sense) and promised to find us customers for the firewood. Finally we got tired of talking, our throats were parched, and we fell silent. It was noontime, the sun was beating down mercilessly; there was not a single cloud in the sky and not a trace of wind in the air. Since the morning we had seen the buildings of the Salavan tannin plant on the horizon and now, after several hours of riding, they did not seem any closer, just like *fata morgana* in the Sahara desert.

It was well after noontime when we finally arrived in Salavan. Maks and Steve decided to stay in a Chuvash woman's cabin where they had lived with the Poles who had prepared firewood for the Home for Polish Invalids. The cabin was at the edge of the settlement and near the forest so that we did not have far to go to our work place. We rode along the main street, Soviet Street. Salavan was a very large industrial settlement. It was located at the edge of a forest, consequently, all of the houses were built out of wood. They were ordinary cabins but put up on a substructure above ground level because it used to get very wet in the spring when the nearby river flooded the settlement. Because of unlimited supply of wood, the cabins were very well kept up. Each cabin had a yard, a stable, a barn and other farm buildings nearby. In the winter when the collective farmers were sent to work in the forest, there were so many people in the cabins and so many horses and oxen in the yards that there was hardly any room to stick a pin.

The modern building of the *dubitelnyi zavod* or the tannic acid plant loomed over the settlement. Next to it was a plant manufacturing wooden goods. It consisted of a wooden barracks. Both plants were surrounded by a high fence and guarded by civilian guards armed with rifles. It was well known that the wood manufacturing plant was commissioned to produce something mysteriously secret for the military. It was whispered, however, and the whole of Salavan as well as every newcomer knew full well that the plant manufactured wooden ammunition boxes and rifle butts. Nevertheless, the plant was guarded as if it manufactured atom bombs.

When we pulled up to our quarters the Chuvash woman who remembered Steve and Maks was happy to see them. She had little room because her son and daughter-in-law had come for a visit. It was hot and stuffy in the room, and we decided to sleep in the hallway. *Babay* chose the top of the Russian stove because "old bones needed the warmth." Our landlady, Aunt Pelagya, was a lively sixty-year old Chuvash woman with little red eyes indicative of chronic trachoma. She lived with an eight-year old grandson whose father had been killed at the front and whose mother was confined to an insane asylum in Ulyanovsk. Needless to say the boy was most happy when we arrived, because of our horse. He offered to water it, take it to pasture, and so on, riding it, of course, rather than leading the animal by its reins.

Based on Steve's and Maks' claims that Aunt Pelagya was 100 percent honest, we gave her the sacks with our provisions and told her to take as much as she needed for preparing our meals. It made no sense to keep the provisions in our knapsacks anyway, because Aunt Pelagya could get to them during our absence. We had no bread, but she lent us a loaf and promised to bake some the next day. In the meantime she made some soup which we devoured with gusto.

Eating soup in a Russian peasant household required a certain amount of dexterity. The soup was poured into a bowl (*blyudo*) and the latter placed in the center of the table. The bowl's capacity depended upon the number of people to be fed but was calculated to be approximately a pint of soup per person. Each person received a wooden spoon and a hunk of bread. Everyone immersed his/her spoon in the bowl, spooned out the soup and carried it to his/her mouth, a distance of about two feet. In order not to spill any of the soup on the table, the person moved the spoon over the piece of bread held in the other hand. If the soup happened to drip, it did so on the bread and not on the table. That way each person had both hands occupied all the time. If there were pieces of meat in the bowl nobody dared to spoon them out until the oldest person gave the signal by saying: "Let's pick out!" (*Davayte vibirat*). At this point all immersed their spoons in the bowl and everyone tried to fish out the best morsel, place it in front of him/her on the table and proceed to eat it with his/her hand. If someone accidentally fished out a piece of meat with their spoon prior to the given signal, it was returned to the bowl.

Most spoons were hand-carved out of wood; sheet metal ones were considered a luxury. Such wooden spoons had a round shape and were approximately 2.5 inches in diameter. Of course, it was impossible to put the spoon or even part of it in the mouth, consequently, one had to pour its contents into one's mouth. For no rhyme or reason, every once in a while each one of the people around the table licked his/her spoon and threw it on the table making a face as if he/she did not like the soup and had no desire to eat any more. After a while, however, that person reached for the spoon and continued eating until the bowl was empty. If the people around the table wanted seconds they shouted: "Add a drop!" and the hostess would pour some more soup into the bowl. When the meal was over everyone belched very loudly and announced: "I am full."

When we finished the soup prepared by Aunt Pelagya (but we did not throw our spoons or belch because we did not think it was polite), *Babay* went to sleep, and we went to see the forester. He lived nearby in a cabin similar to the others except that a buggy stood in front of it, and a horse was in the hallway. We found the forester and his family, which consisted of his wife and two grown children, on a giant bed behind hung sheets that protected them from mosquitoes. The bed stood in the hallway next to the horse. Upon hearing the door open, the forester stuck his head out from behind the sheets and was followed by the rest of his family. He recognized Steve and Maks and got off the bed. We rolled cigarettes and lit them which made me think of a peace pipe ceremony. After exchanging a few inconsequential remarks the boys got down to business and presented Anna Pavlovna's proposition. The forester listened attentively, puffed on his cigarette, stared at the horse's tail and did not say a word. We knew that he was agreeable because "silence is the sign of agreement," as the Russians used to say. "OK," He said after a few minutes. "but I want 2 kilograms (4 pounds) of honey." Maks started to haggle with him trying to bring his demand to 1 kg or at least to 1.5 kg. At this point I shouted to Maks (in Polish) that it was not his honey, that the collective farm's honey should not concern him and that we should let the man have the 2 kg. The deal was struck and we returned to our quarters. *Babay* was already up and Aunt Pelagya had prepared our supper.

After a while Herman, Aunt Pelagya's son, came in with his pregnant Russian wife. We chatted until late that evening about the war, politics, the harvest, etc. Herman was not a particularly interesting individual. He had not been drafted because of a cataract on one eye and worked as a tax collector in the district town. His knowledge of the outside world was limited to material printed in *Pravda* and *Izvestiya*. He knew nothing about the Polish exiles in Soviet Union or about their situation. As far as Herman was concerned we could have just as easily been Martians. We slept in the hallway and fought off the mosquitoes which buzzed us all night.

We got up the next morning and after breakfast were about ready to leave for the forest where the forester was to show us the parcel purchased by our village, when the four wagons sent by Anna Pavlovna pulled up in front of Aunt Pelagya's cabin as we stepped outside. "What *chutzpa*!" Maks fumed. "The bitch knew we would have to steal!" We went with the wagons to the forest and loaded all four with freshly prepared wood from the nearest parcel. Maks gave one of the men a note to Anna Pavlovna telling her in no uncertain terms to send the 2 kg of honey for the forester and we sent the loaded wagons on their way.

We arrived at the place of our meeting with the forester ahead of schedule to allay any suspicions on his part. It would have been disgraceful if it were known that our village mayor's impudence had reached such proportions. The forester showed us the spot, and we immediately started working. *Babay*, noticing our enthusiasm, muttered into his goatie: "*Malays! Don't cut too much because we will load someone else's wood anyway. Spina nye kazyonnaya!*" The old man was simply telling us: Boys! don't break your backs; remember they are yours and not the government's. That first day we were not destined to work a lot. At noontime *Babay* decided to return to Salavan, because he did not have enough prepared wood for hauling away, while the mosquitoes and horseflies bothered our nag to such an extent that the poor animal attempted to flee a few times. We remained in the forest in order to prepare enough wood for the old man to haul away the next day.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon (we had made a sundial out of a stick pushed into a stump of a tree) the sky clouded up. We quit working and decided to go home. It turned out, however, that we could not find our way out of the forest to the road. The forester used old notches cut into the bark of trees to lead us to our work place but we did not cut our own notches and now could not get out of the forest using the old ones. In the meantime it started to rain and then the rain changed into a full-blown storm with thunder and lightning. In a few minutes our clothes were soaked, the downpour blinded us and it became so dark that we could not even see the old notches on the trees. We walked blindly to the accompaniment of constant thunder. After an hour we found ourselves in a glade from where we could see a forest road. We took it and set off toward the settlement. Only then did we discover that we had walked almost a mile into the forest and in the opposite direction of Salavan. When we finally got back to Aunt Pelagya's, we took off our clothes and undergarments which our landlady hung out to dry. We climbed on top of the oven and covered ourselves with blankets. Chills raked our bodies so Aunt Pelagya brewed us some herbs and after drinking them we fell asleep. Once again, miraculously, we did not catch colds.

The next morning heralded a nice day and after breakfast when we were ready to leave for work again the wagons from Anna Pavlovna arrived but without the promised honey. Maks gave the oldest driver hell. He was the same one that had taken the note about honey to Anna Pavlovna the previous day. Nevertheless we took the wagons to the forest and on the way met the forester who joined us in order to point out the wood that could be loaded. Maks calmed him down by writing a note to Anna Pavlovna in his presence in which he (Maks) told her in no uncertain terms that if she did not send the honey we would not load any more wagons because we would not stick out our necks for her lousy 2 kg of honey. Furthermore, she should realize that if the forester caught a wagon with stolen wood he would impound it and that would cause a hell of a lot of trouble because the whole affair would become known to the Party Committee.

The next day no wagons arrived and Maks remarked curtly: "She probably backed off the deal." We cut up quite a bit of wood which *Babay* hauled to the road. We also cut a swath through the forest from the road to our work place after the forester lead us to it again the morning after the rainstorm. That day by noon Mikhala showed up unexpectedly. He was a Chuvash teenager from our collective farm, Uncle Grisha's son. The family was extremely decent, pleasant, clean and without trachoma. Before collectivization Uncle Grisha had been a *kulak* and, consequently, was shipped off to a prison camp in the northern part of the Soviet Union. When his prison term ended he returned to find his family starving and thrown out of their home into a shed. Uncle Grisha stubbornly refused to join the collective farm which he hated with a passion but went to work in a nearby state farm (*sovchoz*) instead. In due course things went back to normal and, influenced by his friend, Stepan Fyodorovich, Uncle Grisha joined our collective farm when the German villagers were exiled in 1941. The whole family worked and each one of them was a very conscientious worker. Uncle Grisha's wife guarded the collective farm's vegetable gardens. Mikhala and his father worked in the fields. The older daughter, Pola, worked in the stable while the younger one, Shurka, attended school. Uncle Grisha's oldest son was missing in action at the front. The most educated of all of the children was Mikhala, who had graduated as a valedictorian from the seven-grade school in Sergeyevka and then went on to finish a tractor drivers course. *Mikhala, on krepko gramotny!* (Mikhala, he is well educated!) Uncle Stepan Fyodorovich used to say with pride. Unfortunately Mikhala was stone-deaf and had a voice as if it were coming out of the bottom of a deep well.

When Maks saw Mikhala with a wagon and a pair of horses, he started yelling at him like a

madman saying that he would not give him a single piece of wood if he (Mikhala) did not have the honey with him. When the boy finally could get in a word, it turned out that he did not bring any honey, because he did not come from Anna Pavlovna but had been sent on behalf of the collective farm. "Sergey Stepanovich asks you to load the wagon with red oak," Mikhala said. "Of course, he will reward you. The collective is in dire need of four wagons of red oak." We held a brief conference. The proposal was tempting, the situation was amusing, because we were being approached as if we managed the forest, and the whole affair was rather dangerous, because it was forbidden to haul away red oak. It was for the exclusive use of the tannic acid plant and now had to be brought from the more distant parts of the forest because the supply near Salavan had run out. Red oak was rarely encountered and extremely valuable. When we had gotten lost during rainstorm we had come upon a cut up red oak trunk in the glade from which we found our way home. We drove with Mikhala to the glade, loaded the heavy three-foot diameter oak pieces on his wagon and camouflaged them at both ends with pieces of linden tree in case Mikhala encountered the forester. We established with the boy that from now on he would arrive in the evening, so that we would ride at night into the forest and load the oak onto his wagon undisturbed.

The next day we went to work and upon returning to our lodgings discovered that the wagons had arrived from Sergeyevka with Anna Pavlovna herself bringing the honey and my uncle as one of the drivers. Consequently, the four of us divided our functions. Steve took my uncle's wagon and went with the other Sergeyevka wagons to the forest to load the wood. *Babay* potatoes for supper, Maks went with Anna Pavlovna and her honey to the forester, and I remained with my uncle to hear the latest news. There was plenty of it, and it was very interesting. My uncle had succeeded in contacting the Union of Polish Patriots, which with assistance from the Committee for Polish Children's Affairs at the State Commissariat for Education, was organizing Polish schools or hours set aside in Soviet schools for instruction in the Polish language, history and geography. The Union told my uncle to contact the school principal in Sergeyevka but Maria Alexandrovna was not enthusiastic about including Polish language hours in the school's program. One of my aunt's very close friends was a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of Polish Patriots, and my aunt wrote a letter to him describing our situation. Her letter was answered by the man's wife who promised to send parcels. Sure enough a parcel containing food and clothes arrived shortly thereafter.

The most unusual event in our village was the return of several women, who had been tried and sentenced for refusing to accept Soviet passports, from a prison camp. My uncle said that they looked like walking skeletons in spite of the fact that they had spent only five months in confinement. The overall conditions were so tragic and the food so bad that all of them were suffering from vitamin deficiencies, dysentery, herpes and other skin diseases. While in the camp, the women somehow found a few scraps of paper and through the camp office wrote petitions to Kalinin, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, asking for a pardon. They also sent letters full of despair to Wanda Wasilewska, the chairperson of the Union of Polish Patriots, begging for her assistance. Some of the petitioners were granted pardons, but neither Wasilewska nor the Union of Polish Patriots ever answered a single letter. Such was the attitude of UPP toward the Polish population which had been left behind by the Government-in-Exile. My aunt "adopted" one of the women who returned to live with us while the others found shelter with other Polish families in the village. My uncle continued to arrive with the other Sergeyevka carters every other day, and Mikhala showed up for four consecutive nights to haul away red oak. After two weeks we finished our work in the forest, returned to the collective farm and went back to threshing.

The rainy cold October days were upon us, and it was time to get ready for the severe Russian winter. We had a little firewood (1-2 wagon-loads) which had accumulated because my uncle would drop off a piece of wood on his way from the forest. The collective farm promised to give us one wagon-load of firewood but this promise was meaningless, because we needed at least 12 wagon-loads to get us through the winter. Aware of what to expect we had prepared *kizyaki* in the summer just like the collective farmers had done.

Kizyaki were made out of horse and cow manure which were mixed with straw and water, shaped into small bricks, and dried in the sun. They served as fuel. As early as July we began the very important activity of preparing a supply of *kizyaki*. We had borrowed a horse and a wagon from the collective farm and hauled ten wagon-loads of manure already mixed with straw from the collective farm's stable, which we dumped in a pile in front of our cabin. Then we hauled two barrels of water which we poured on top of

the manure pile. Next my uncle, Steve and I took turns stomping barefoot in the manure which reached to our knees. For three hours we also had a pair of horses walk in it to mix the manure with the water real well and change it into a black mass. Using shovels, as well as our hands and feet, we squeezed the black mass into wooden forms, bowls, pots and other available containers to form the material into individual *kizyaki* which we subsequently shook out of the forms and arranged to dry on the grass around the cabin. For two days our whole family, Aunt Styosha and the "adopted" Pani Pola messed in the manure and as a result the stink of 2500 drying *kizyaki* wafted into our room. During the subsequent weeks we turned them over from side to side, and then arranged them into small piles and later into bigger ones so that they would dry real well. When the rainy season came upon us, our fuel supply was transferred to a shed. We also had two wagon-loads of straw behind the cabin which we used as fuel for the preparation of our meals. While one person did the actual cooking, another person fed small amounts of straw into the fire so as not to have the fire blow out of the oven.

In the middle of October the newspapers printed the news that the First Polish Tadeusz Kosciuszko Division had participated in a battle with the enemy near Lenino, a small town in the Smolensk Province. The Soviet generals were ecstatic about the Polish heroism demonstrated during a bayonette charge. A roster of those decorated for bravery with the Polish military decorations Krzyz Virtuti Militari and Krzyz Walecznych (Cross for Bravery) which were reintroduced by the Union of Polish Patriots, was published. The highest Soviet decoration for bravery, Hero of the Soviet Union, was bestowed on several killed in action. One of them, Captain Huebner, turned out to be alive but very seriously wounded. There was neither news about nor letters from the Poles drafted into the Polish division from our village. Polish women added their tears to those of the Chuvash, Mordvinian, Tatar and Russian women who almost every day had news about their loved ones being killed, wounded or missing in action.

One day we were visited by a Pole who had arrived in Petrovka just a few months before. He had been an assistant to pan Piotrowski, the warehouse manager in the Polish Embassy, and after the Embassy left was arrested for refusing to accept a Soviet passport. A few months later he was released and sent to Petrovka. There was no point in keeping the man in prison because he was an invalid. Way back in 1940 after having been arrested by the Soviets in Wilno as a former police sergeant, he had slashed both of his wrists. Since that time he could not use his hands. Because of his experiences he had become somewhat mentally unbalanced and had started writing political poems with stupid themes and no rhymes whatsoever. When the man read one of his poems about Wanda Wasilewska who "betrayed her country" to us, my uncle advised him to burn those "fruits of his inspiration" as they would get him into trouble with the authorities. This was more than precautionary advice, because at that time the former mistress of pan Piotrowski and another Polish woman showed up in Petrovka. Neither made any bones about the fact that they were NKVD informers. Undoubtedly, after the departure of the Embassy and its staff, including pan Piotrowski, the NKVD hired his mistress as an informer. It probably did not take too much effort or too many threats on their part. She was a dull and stupid woman, and one had to watch oneself in her presence.

In a few days we forgot about the "Poet from Petrovka," because three events took place in the life of our village. One day Henryk, who had had escaped from the Koshki prison with Father Wladyslaw, showed up in Sergeyevka. The two of them had been in hiding somewhere in a neighboring district where they were joined by two women from the "Engels Collective Farm" so that "the boys would not feel lonely." The arrival of Henryk who "parked" himself at the Goldbergs' electrified all of the Poles and especially the children from the Indom who started visiting him. The new director had Anna Pavlovna arrest Henryk and old Uncle Grisha, Mikhala's father, was appointed to deliver Henryk to the militia in Koshki. At noontime a *tarantas* (a light Russian carriage) with the prisoner and his escort left Sergeyevka. At dusk Uncle Grisha returned all shaken up and reported to Anna Pavlovna that the prisoner had escaped. It turned out that they had taken a road bypassing Little Sergeyevka which was under quarantine because of a contagious disease which affected horses. When they were driving through a gully Henryk got stomach cramps and asked Uncle Grisha to stop. The old man did, Henryk jumped out of the *tarantas* and went behind some bushes. When he did not show up after a few hours, Uncle Grisha turned around and returned to Sergeyevka reporting that the prisoner had escaped. He spent several sleepless nights worrying about being arrested but the whole incident was promptly forgotten.

The second event, court proceedings in neighboring Little Sergeyevka, aroused the attention of the

collective farmers in almost all of the Koshki district. Back in September the director of the Indom, who was the Party representative for that village, had caught a woman-farmer putting down a sack of grain in front of her cabin. Immediately the militia was called in and an investigation started, which resulted in the arrest of 17 people including the warehouse manager, two pregnant women and several sixteen-year old girls and boys. The whole district waited for the outcome of that trial because the theft of a collective farm's property was considered to be an equivalent crime to counter-revolutionary and antigovernment activity which carried sentences of death or ten-years at hard labor in the prison camps. The district authorities staged the trial so that it would set an example and scare the nearby collective farms. The trial took place in Little Sergeyevka where the defendants were brought to the "court" under heavy guard. The court proceedings took place in the farm's administration office and lasted two days. The verdict was announced on the third day: one death sentence, several ten-year and 5-10 year sentences at hard labor in a prison camp for the remaining defendants. The death sentence was appealed to Kalinin, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, who commuted it to 15 years at hard labor in a prison camp. The district newspaper described the punishment as "well-deserved for sabotage" on its front page. I knew, however, that since the deportation of the German farmers the collective was paying its members only 100-200 grams ($\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ pound) of grain for a work-day and even if anyone could earn 1000 work-days in a year (which was impossible!) that person's annual earnings would have been only 100-200 kg (220-440 lbs) of grain a year for himself and his family.

The third event which shook up the population of our village was Maks' wedding. One day in the middle of October Maks came to our lodgings and announced to my uncle while still in the entry-way: "Sir, I am getting married." We were not surprised. After all, one could expect anything from Maks. Actually there was nothing wrong with Maks' getting married. The boy was lonely and needed not so much family warmth and understanding as physical warmth in the form of decent living quarters in view of the approaching winter as well as food and "TLC." He would not have been able to survive the winter on his earnings from working for the collective farm. Staying with the Goldbergs did not provide Maks either with physical warmth or with personal understanding because Roza hated him passionately and the feeling was mutual. The girl considered Maks to be a bad influence on her brothers and, basically, she was correct. My uncle's first question was: "Are you marrying a cow?" meaning a woman with a cow. "No, with honey," was the answer. "That is not bad either!" all of us answered in unison. "A kilogram (about 2 pounds) of honey sells for 300 *rubles* on the open market." In the meantime Maks started talking seriously about his marriage plans and we listened to him with great interest.

Maks' "chosen" was Nusya Pavlovna, the new bookkeeper of our *Selpo* and the sister of Ivan Pavlovich, the chairman of the *Raipotrebsoyuz* and my uncle's friend when the latter was still the Director of the Home for Polish Invalids. Nusya roomed with our postmistress, Nadya, and that was where Maks had met her. The girl was Maks' age but had a slightly slanting mouth, the result of the paralysis of a nerve. Her parents lived in the neighboring district 35 km (22 miles) from Sergeyevka and owned eleven beehives which netted approximately 200 kg (450 pounds) of honey annually. The wedding was to take place in the beginning of November in the home of the bride's sister who lived not far in a Mordvinian village. My uncle was to be the best man. After a few days the young couple finalized the wedding date, and Maks started inviting guests. My uncle, Steve and I were the only Poles invited to the wedding. The Russian guests consisted of the village mayor, the chairman and the bookkeeper of the collective farm, the chief foreman, Uncle Misha, and the foreman of the tractor brigade, a tall Ukrainian named Shulin.

On the wedding day it turned out that the two foremen, who had never missed an opportunity to drink vodka drove to the wedding. Sergey Stepanovich, the chairman of the collective, could not come to the wedding, because he had to attend an unexpected meeting in Koshki, but he issued Maks a requisition for 8 kg (17 pounds) of flour, a pound of honey and a pound of butter as a wedding gift. The value of these gifts, calculated in terms of prices on the open market, was 1500 *rubles*. That day at dusk two *tarantases* with a foremen in each pulled up in front of our cabin. The first one, driven by Uncle Misha, was for the groom and my uncle, the best man. Steve and I went in the second one driven by Shulin.

We were dressed in our best finery, flannel plaid windbreakers with zippers and pants. Steve's were khaki, mine were dark-green and my uncle's were grey. Maks wore riding breeches and laced-up high brown boots which were actually too small for him but looked real sharp. Of course, all our outfits

were, at one time or another, gifts from the Polish Embassy. Shulin was dressed in a black suit whose jacket had a tuxedo cut. There were 150 tuxedos in the last transport shipped from the Embassy and the Russians as well as the Chuvashes fought to buy them from the Poles. The tuxedos were subsequently altered by Goldberg, the tailor, and made into jackets. Shulin's jacket was too small for him and it looked as if it would fall apart at any moment into its components; *i.e.* sleeves, lapels, the back and buttons. Uncle Misha wore a military tunic and his everyday patched trousers. He had no other clothes because he used to spend all of his earnings on vodka. We were quick to notice that both foremen had started celebrating Maks' and Nusya's wedding even before leaving our village. Both reeked of vodka, and I remarked it was dangerous to light a cigarette under such circumstances because of the danger of an explosion. At any rate, the cavalier ride was accompanied by the veering of the vehicles from one side of the road to the other, which indicated that both foremen were higher than kites.

It was already dark by the time we arrived in the Mordvinian village and it turned out that Maks could not find his future sister-in-law's cabin. "What do you want of me?" He tried to explain, "I was there only once." We wandered around the village in worsening visibility because of a blizzard and finally found Nusya's sister's cabin. After unhitching our horses and putting them into the stable we entered the room. The guests had been gathered and were waiting for the groom and his party. Nusya's sister, a giant of a woman with two rows of gold (actually brass!) teeth loudly kissed Maks on both cheeks. Maks' future mother-in-law, a tall white-haired old woman was also there. She called Maks *Maxim*. Then the introductions of those present followed. One had to admit that it was an impressive crowd because Nusya's sister was the chairperson of the *Sel'po* which encompassed several villages as well as the manager of the local store. So among the guests there was the village mayor, the chairman of the collective farm, the village secretary, bookkeepers, tractor drivers, etc., husbands with wives, wives with husbands and even the school principal who had an impressive greying mane.

Finally we sat down to a lavishly set table with rolls and pies with meat, cabbage, carrot, pumpkin, potatoes, etc. The young couple sat at the head of the table and opposite them sat their closest friends, Nadya, our postmistress, my uncle and Uncle Misha, the foreman from our collective farm. Next to my uncle Maks placed Steve and me ("Sit close. I want to make sure that you eat and don't hold back!"). Next to us was Ivan Ivanovich Shulin, the foreman of our tractor brigade.

Now the party started. Nusya's sister brought out vodka in a five-liter tea kettle and poured it into regular glasses about three-quarter full. First we toasted the young couple, then the bride, and then the groom. By that time the party was in full swing. We continued to drink vodka chasing it with pickles, pies, and anything fit for the stomach. The tea kettle got empty in no time flat and the hostess filled it again. The mood was hardly sublime; the guests were higher than kites. Their eyes had that "far out" look, some were hiccupping from the excessive drinking and Maks yelled across the table in Polish: "Eat! After all I am not going to get married often! Those hicks will clean up everything anyway! I have already put away some food for Kathy! (my little cousin)." While we were sitting around the table and eating, the high point of the wedding was for someone to shout "Bitter! Bitter!" at which point the bride and groom kissed and the guests yelled "Sweet! Sweet!"

Finally the guests had enough to drink and to eat, and even finished belching. Nadya and Nusya picked up their guitars, a signal for the dancing to start. Uncle Misha, our collective's foreman, was the first to jump into the center of the room. He began dancing like a trained bear to a popular Russian folk song, singing *Ekh! Kuma nye zhuris! Tuda syuda povernis!* ("Ekh, Godmother don't be bashful! Turn this way and that way!"). The audience was clapping their hands to the beat and shouting *Ekh! Ekh!* Ivan Ivanovich Shulin jumped up from his chair, straightened his six-foot ten-inch frame, grabbed a kerosene lamp from the table and swinging it to the beat like an orchestra conductor swings a baton yelled *Sergeyevka byeryet!* ("Sergeyevka is tops!") meaning that our village is the best in terms of dancing.

Some Mordvin jumped out on the dance floor, shoved Uncle Misha into a corner and started dancing like a mad man. *Nasha byeryet!* ("Our side is tops!") yelled the guests from the bride's party. At this moment Maks jumped into the center of the floor ("There is nothing that guy cannot do." I said to myself). *Sergeyevka beryet!* we yelled in turn while Ivan Ivanovich Shulin jumped up and down behind the table, the kerosene lamp still in his hand. It became obvious at this point that the inhabitants of the Mordvinian village felt offended. The drunk collective farm secretary, who had been sitting next to Nusya's

mother, decided to defend their honor. He got up and threateningly waving his fists and screaming: "Fight those Polish scoundrels!" started pushing toward my uncle who was engaged in a conversation with the school principal. The music stopped, Steve and I jumped from our seats. Shulin put down the kerosene lamp and attempted to step over the table shouting: "How dare you insult our friends?!". But before we managed to stop him the drunk Uncle Misha flew out of the corner and in a flash his giant fist landed on the aggressor's jaw. The secretary fell to the floor and Uncle Misha, who was so drunk that he had could hardly stand on his feet, fell on top of him. The more sober guests pulled the two bodies into the hallway and the party resumed except that singing was substituted for dancing. Although the guests were extremely drunk they managed to harmonize their voices beautifully and, accompanied by some of the girls playing guitars and a balalayka, sang melancholy Russian ballads about the troika driver and the Volga River, songs from the Civil War period and the new war marches and songs. At three o'clock in the morning the party broke up. The table was moved under one wall and Nussy's sister spread out two large sheepskin coats on the floor for the guests to sleep. Everybody lay down without undressing except for Ivan Ivanovich Shulin who did take off his jacket because it was too tight. "It may split." He remarked casually.

We got up at 11 o'clock the next morning with bloodshot eyes, splitting headaches and hangovers. Outside the cabin we splashed ourselves with freezing water, because there was a slight frost. Then we sat down at the table to finish some leftovers from the wedding feast. Everybody drank a glass of sauerkraut juice to cure the headache and then we started again with the vodka which was also supposed to cure hangovers. It was late in the afternoon when we returned home. My uncle went to sleep immediately. Steve and I looked like squeezed out lemons and dragged ourselves around the room like zombies. That evening Maks with his bride, her family and Nadya, the postmistress, came over to visit us for a new round of partying. They brought pies, meat and vodka. Again we drank, ate and danced but this time the party broke up early because Kathy, my little cousin, had to go to sleep. Thanks to Uncle Misha's intervention (its cost: a liter of vodka) Maks and Nussy could live in the cabin of a Chuvash woman.

Nussy was a very likable girl and one evening a few days after the wedding came over with Maks and her friend, Nadya. The latter liked us very much and we always kidded her that she was in love with my uncle. The girls brought a guitar and sang duets. When our landlady went to the cow shed on night duty, the girls sang in a whisper: *Kogda Lenin umiral Stalinu prikazyva: Khleba v dovol nye davay, myasa nye pokazyvay.* (When Lenin was on his deathbed, he ordered Stalin: Don't give them enough bread and don't show them any meat.). We were shocked and Steve actually went outside to see that nobody was eavesdropping under the window.

Tragedy Strikes

In the first days of November (1943) my uncle received a letter from the Union of Polish Patriots (UPP) notifying him that in view of the approaching November 11, the anniversary of Poland's regaining her independence in 1918, the Union had asked the Soviet Government for the permission of holding meetings in Polish centers in order to appropriately commemorate that anniversary and that the permission had been granted. Furthermore, the Union recommended that my uncle organizes such a meeting in Sergeyevka for the whole district and that he contacts the Soviet authorities regarding that matter. A mimeographed prepared text of a speech in Polish to be delivered at the meeting was enclosed with the letter. The four of us, my uncle, Steve, Maks and I sat down for a powwow. On the one hand a letter from the UPP addressed to my uncle was a good sign. After a prolonged silence since the arrival of the previous letter about organizing Polish language program for Polish children, the present letter could be interpreted to mean that the UPP bore no grudge toward him for his cooperation with the Polish Embassy. On the other hand the text of the enclosed speech was so blatantly pro-communist and so hostile toward the prewar and present Polish governments that it would be most inappropriate for it to be read to the gathered Poles by the former Director of the Home for Polish Invalids.

One of the most blatant statements in the text was a section which stated that in 1918 Poland had regained her independence not as the result of President's Wilson's Fourteen Points but thanks to Lenin's pronouncement that the nations occupied by tsarist Russia would have the right to self-determination. Actually, at that time, Polish territory was occupied by Germany and not by tsarist Russia! Another part of the text contained inflammatory and insulting attacks on Marshal Pilsudski, described as a "fascist and a bloodsucker of the Polish nation," and on Generals Sikorski, Anders and Sosnkowski as well as on the Government-in-Exile, all described as "Hitler's lackeys who betrayed Poland." Even if the rest of the text was immaterial to the listeners, the paragraphs containing the derogatory remarks about Marshal Pilsudski, the "George Washington of Poland," and about the government in London would not sit well with the listeners and could potentially evoke hostility toward the UPP. After all, it was the Government-in-Exile which had gotten us out of the prison and labor camps, and then helped us out with food and clothing. Furthermore, almost everyone had a close relative in Gen. Anders' army. Those people had joined that army to fight for a free Poland and not to betray her by supporting Hitler. As we were pondering what to do, my uncle came up with a brilliant idea. "You know what," He said. "I will send the text of the speech to the District Commandant of the NKVD under the auspices of having it checked for political reliability ("subjected to censorship" in plain language). He will not understand the text because it is in Polish and will either permit us to have the meeting or will return the text after November 11, then it will be of no use." The text together with an appropriate cover letter went out the next day.

On November 9, 1943, I happened to be working in the windmill pouring grain from the sacks onto the millstones. After two days of commemorating the 26th anniversary of the October Revolution (according to the present and not the "Old Style" calendar) with meetings, pompous speeches, feast and dancing in the village club, the collective farm had returned to its usual activities. I happened to take a break and went inside the millers' cabin to have a smoke, chat with Aunt Masha and find out what Nina had written from Stalingrad. I did not like to smoke outside in the cold and it was just as cold inside the mill as it was outside. The ground was frozen and cracked, and the first big snow of the season was expected any day. Both Aunt Masha and I looked out the window when a *tarantas* pulled by a strong black stallion stopped at the mill's entrance. The driver jumped out of his seat and staggered into the mill. "Probably some big shot." Aunt Masha remarked sarcastically.

After a few minutes the man came out carrying a hundred-pound sack with flour, dumped it into the *tarantas*, covered it thoroughly with hay and left. Uncle Peter came into the room. "Who was that?" Aunt Masha asked her husband. "Do you remember Vasiliy, the collective farm chairman in Kuliki village, who was sentenced to a five-year prison term for failing to complete the harvest?" Uncle Peter answered. "Now he works as a coachman for the NKVD commandant who just arrived in the village." I became alarmed. Returning home from work I found my whole family very excited. It turned out that the commandant, totally drunk, had visited us and brought back the text of the speech that my uncle had sent to him. The commandant had immediately sent for the Director of Indom and not only permitted him to organize the commemorative meeting but categorically ordered it to take place. Furthermore, he told the director in no uncertain terms to provide my uncle with any assistance he might need and to send the

children as "artists-participants." "Maybe I will come to see it." The commandant said as he left the room. The director became very solicitous and immediately sent a few boys and girls to have them learn some poems and decide about the artistic part of the program with my uncle. That evening when we reminisced about the day full of excitement, it was concluded that the paragraphs attacking the London Government and the Polish Armed Forces in the West would be left out of the reading the prepared text.

On November 11, 1943, the whole Polish population of Sergeyevka was in a jubilant mood. From the early morning the invalids and the children cleaned the club hall, constantly burnt straw in the only stove so that hall would stay warm and the audience would not freeze, brought in large portraits of Lenin, Stalin and Kosciuszko, a giant red flag and three small ones: Polish, British and American, which had to be drawn on paper because nobody in the Indom knew what the British and American flags looked like. The NKVD commandant was supposed to notify the other Polish centers in his district so we expected a large audience. By 4:00 p.m. the club hall was already full. All of the Poles from the village and all of the invalids were in attendance. The invited Russians could not hide their surprise and admiration: "Amazing! When the Poles have a holiday meeting, they all come." Only two persons arrived from the other Polish centers; namely, the Embassy's ex-warehouse manager Piotrowski's mistress with her friend. The former was dressed in a beautiful seal fur coat. Both of them lived in Petrovka. "The commandant will not come." I whispered to my uncle. "He sent his 'representatives' instead." Both women were NKVD informers. Of course, they tried to draw my uncle, Steve, Maks and me into a conversation but were unsuccessful. We were very cautious about expressing ourselves, and they acted their parts so stupidly that any fool could figure out they were informers.

At 5 o'clock sharp (this punctuality also surprised the Russians!) my uncle stepped onto the stage, announced that we were celebrating the 25th anniversary of Poland's independence and read the text of the speech omitting the offensive parts. When my uncle stepped down to the sound of deafening applause, the Indom director delivered a short speech wishing the Poles a speedy return to a "free, independent, democratic, but not bourgeois Poland." The audience applauded politely as he stepped down. Then children from the Indom and our Kathy recited various poems and danced Russian folk dances. Although the meeting was a huge success and my uncle mailed a detailed report about it to the Union of Polish Patriots in Moscow, the news brought by the two women from Petrovka was disturbing and gave us ample reason to worry.

Several days earlier the NKVD had arrested two people in Petrovka. One was the amateur-poet, who had visited my uncle at one time and had read to him the poem about Wanda Wasilewska. During a search of his belongings the militia found that poem, some other poems and similar nonsense which was confiscated as hostile material. After a few days we received the news that Mr. Dunin, his wife, Mr. Kochanski and a few other individuals had been arrested in Melekess. The Dunins were picked up in their home. We knew that they had passports without specified citizenship (so called "Nansen passports") and thought nothing could happen to them. Mr. Kochanski, who had a Soviet passport, was arrested as a trick so as not to arouse suspicions and to prevent panic. He was ordered to appear before a military commission for possible drafting into the army, but then it became known through the grapevine that Mr. Kochanski was taken to a prison in Ulyanovsk and not to any army depot. Panic swept through our family and over those Poles in the district who had refused to accept Soviet passports and did not have any new documents. In Petrovka there were two brothers who had escaped "passportization" by hiding in a cellar that had straw spread over its entrance door in the floor of a room. A goat slept on the straw. In the "Engels Collective Farm" there were two or three such persons. Then there was our family, Maks and four invalids.

In the meantime people were telling us that the Director of the Indom was spreading all kinds of rumors about my uncle and the rest of us. In his meetings with the invalids he called us fascists, Hitler's hirelings, Anders' and Sosnkowski's supporters as well as traitors of Poland, and he openly threatened that "he would finish us before our departure for Poland." This director, who also turned out to be an NKVD officer, was soon to be transferred to the Ukraine and his successor had already arrived in Sergeyevka. In his vicious campaign against my uncle and our family the Indom director was assisted by his deputy in charge of political education (*politruk*). The *politruk* was a mean redheaded creature who had begun his career as a stable boy and went on to become a Communist Party member and a *politruk* by denouncing scores of innocent countrymen to the NKVD. He knew the contents of every chapter and

every page in the abbreviated version of the "History of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks" by heart but every word he wrote contained at least one spelling error.

My uncle decided to put an end to those rumors and inuendoes by having a talk with the director and the *politruk*. Actually it was Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, who gave my uncle that idea. "However, don't expect too much from that know-nothing." She said. "Even Michael, an employee of the Embassy, made faces and smiled when you transferred the Home for Polish Invalids to the Soviet authorities." My uncle ignored that caustic remark. After all he could not tell her that Michael was an NKVD informant although Anna Pavlovna must have known it. The conversation between my uncle and the director bore no fruit. Both he and the *politruk* denied everything and immediately switched the conversation to general topics especially because the incoming director and the bookkeeper were also present.

Again a few tense days passed by and finally the "bomb was dropped" before noontime on November 28, 1943, when a messenger from the mayor's office brought orders for my uncle, Steve and me to present ourselves the next morning at 11:00 o'clock at the District Militia Headquarters in Koshki "to settle our affairs related to personal documents." Actually we did not anticipate anything drastic and fully expected to be given the passports without a specified citizenship ("Nansen passports"). We even decided that if we were faced with the choices: a Soviet passport or imprisonment, we would settle on the former. The news about the four of us being called to Koshki spread like wildfire. Not even an hour had passed before pani Justynka showed up. She started pontificating, surmising, etc., but we could almost read her mind and sensed her jealousy that "we were always lucky and even now would be given passports with no specified citizenship." We asked her to "look" into her cards. Pani Justynka, who never moved anywhere without them, assumed her "battle stance" (standing, with one leg on the chair!), spread out the cards, looked at them and then collected them back into a deck. "I cannot tell your fortunes. I am too nervous." She said and left.

The next morning we got up early, took a half-loaf of bread and started for Koshki. Although it was the end of November only the fields were covered with the first snow. The wind blew it off of the road and we marched as if we were stepping on asphalt. Steve, Maks and my uncle talked, shared observations and tried to guess the reasons for us being called in by the militia. I kept silent. I never talked while walking long distances, because it made me tired and nervous. As we approached the Pogruznyaya railroad station a small sled drawn by a handsome stallion came toward us from around the bend. The sled slowed down when it passed us and the passenger, who was wrapped in a big sheepskin coat, examined us carefully and then sped away. Maks was the first to break the silence remarking: "Some puss!" "Probably a big shot driving to a collective farm for a bribe!" One of us added. On the road between the station and Koshki we met Pani Justynka. Jealous because we had been called by the militia while she was not, she went to Koshki on her own the previous day after leaving us. We asked her for the details of her trip but did not find out anything of consequence. She went to the militia but was told: "We did not order you to present yourself so get back the Indom. When your time comes we will also call you!"

We arrived in Koshki before noon and after a brief rest at Aunt Tosya's went to the building housing the militia headquarters. We entered the guard room and handed the slips of paper ordering us to present ourselves at the militia to the guard on duty. He told us to wait on a bench outside a railing dividing the room into two parts. "We are not arrested as yet." Maks mumbled to himself. If we were we would have been ordered to stand on the other side of the railing. The militiaman left the room, returned after a while, called my uncle's name and then led him outside. We surmised that they were going to the building housing the NKVD. Thus far nobody had called us. A half an hour passed, then an hour, then two hours. My uncle did not return nor were we told anything. I became alarmed and had an inner feeling of disaster. "Something is not right." I whispered to Steve. "They must have arrested him." Steve and Maks attempted to find other reasons for my uncle's disappearance which were downright stupid and childish. At 4:00 p.m. my uncle came into the guard room escorted by an NKVD officer whose face looked familiar. In a split second I recalled all my meetings with members of this most powerful organization in the Soviet Union. Got it! The preceding year the officer had served as the NKVD Commandant of our district, visited the Home for Polish Invalids, commented about the crucifix hung on the wall above Father Oszmianski's mattress, about the lack of beds and about "the louse-infested Poles." "Search him and put into a cell!" The officer growled to the militiaman. My uncle was white as a sheet. "I am finished." He said to me.

"They charged me with antistate activity. Take care of the women." He was referring to my aunt and to my little cousin, Kathy.

We returned to Sergeyevka heavyhearted. A thousand thoughts went through our minds: a tragic mistake? someone's maliciousness or revenge?. And then the worst duty upon returning home: explaining to my aunt why her husband had not returned with us. We walked in silence. Beyond the Pogruznaya railroad station we came upon a sled with the Indom director and pani Hanka, the cook, going to Koshki. At that moment everything became clear to me. The Director was on his way to fulfill the threat of "finishing" us and even had with him a witness for *ochmaya stavka*, an eye-to-eye confrontation with the accused." These methods were known to us from 1942 when the representatives of the Polish Embassy had been arrested and Poles testified in the presence of the accused that the latter had engaged in spying, sabotage, etc. although the testimony was a bunch of lies. The Director struggled with the horse which had jumped into a trench with the snow up to its knees and could not get out. Pani Hanka shouted asking us to give them a hand but we just passed by paying no attention to the two of them.

It started getting dark. I hoped that our walk would never end because I just dreaded breaking the tragic news to my aunt. Maks and Steve had similar thoughts but somewhere deep inside of our brains lingered only one question: "Who will be next?" We were positive that our turn would come soon. Since that day, November 29, 1943, and until the moment of our departure for Poland on March 20, 1946, I expected constantly, day and night, to be arrested. Maks lived in fear of arrest only until April 19, 1944, when he was taken away. He was the second from our group. Steve lived in uncertainty of his future until June 1944, when his fear of arrest changed to the fear of not making it through the war alive because he was drafted into the Polish Army of the Union of Polish Patriots.

It was already dark when we returned to Sergeyevka. My aunt, her eyes red from crying, met us on the threshold: "I know everything. Just tell me what happened." We told her about what had happened in Koshki and about our encountering the Indom director and pani Hanka on our way back. In turn my aunt told us what had happened during our absence. Our suspicions regarding the lone rider met on the road from Koshki turned out to be correct. He was a member of NKVD who, upon his arrival in Sergeyevka, came to our room with Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor. He announced to my terror-stricken aunt that her husband had been detained for antistate activities. Subsequently he began a thorough search of the room. Kathy started crying: "Give me back my father!" Anna Pavlovna stood under one wall with tears in her eyes and from time to time admonished the searcher when he became too eager and ripped open Kathy's rag dolls, threw around their dresses and Kathy's clay toys. The room looked as if a tornado had gone through it. The NKVD man did not leave anything undisturbed. He even emptied the three envelopes with my stamp collection. Afterwards Kathy put the stamps back into the envelopes and asked me with tears in her eyes not to be mad at her. During the search the NKVD man took my uncle's sketchbook with his sketches of people's faces and views of places where we had lived (my uncle was quite talented at drawing), my diary which I had kept since leaving Warsaw on September 7, 1939, my parents' last letter to me dated June 10, 1941, and some other letters and papers which had no value. When the search was over the NKVD man left on the table a list of items to be delivered to my uncle the next morning. It specified four changes of shirts and underwear, a blanket, two sheets, two pillow cases, six pairs of socks, six handkerchiefs, four bath towels and four face towels. It seemed strange that a prisoner would need such a quantity of underwear, linens, etc. Besides we neither had those things in the quantities specified nor did we have the money to buy them on the black market, the only place in the Soviet Union where anything could be purchased albeit at very inflated prices.

The NKVD man had said before leaving that all inquiries about my uncle should be directed to the NKVD office in Koshki as. We started considering two possibilities regarding my uncle's fate: either he would be secretly shipped abroad, or he would be interned in some camp under pretty decent conditions as a foreigner. These possibilities, no matter how fantastic, were not totally groundless. When the Polish Embassy left the Soviet Union in May 1943, the Australian Mission had taken over the protection of Polish citizens' rights and a few weeks before my uncle's arrest many Poles, primarily those who had not accepted Soviet passports, received cables from the Australian Mission notifying them that "the addressee and his/her family had been placed on an evacuation list and the OVIR (Department of Visas and Registration of Foreigners) at the local NKVD office would accept their applications for exit visas from the Soviet Union." Also before my uncle's arrest we had received four money orders for 400 *rubles* each.

Undoubtedly the Polish Embassy had left funds for helping out the field representatives of its Social Welfare Department and rosters of Poles at the Australian Mission before leaving the Soviet Union.

In the evening my aunt prepared a package for her husband. Although it contained fewer items than there were on the NKVD man's list, it contained a sufficient number of shirts and underwear. Anyway, we could not spare more. Steve and I had only two shirts and two changes of underwear each left. The next day I waited until dawn (so as not to encounter wolves on the way) before leaving on foot for Koshki with the package. When I arrived at the NKVD building it was still before office hours and I waited inside on the stairs. Snow driven by a cold wind blew outside. An old janitor who was sweeping the stairs looked carefully around and said to me in a whisper: "Sonny, did you come to that Pole? Well, he ain't here no more. At dawn they took him away in a car with that officer who came from Kuibyshev." My heart sank. I waited on those stairs until noontime when Luba, the militiawoman who had stolen the wedding band when my aunt had been imprisoned, arrived for work. She took the parcel from me, opened it and shook each item carefully looking for a letter. "Why so few things?" She asked. "We have no more." I answered. "Where is the prisoner?" I asked. "I want to have that parcel delivered to him in my presence. "He is not here anymore. Take the receipt." Luba said as she handed me a slip of paper with the contents of the parcel listed on it. I left the building and went back to Sergeyevka.

Life Must Go On

The dark colorless days of the Russian winter were rolling by. My aunt cried constantly and spent sleepless nights walking around the room and chain-smoking cigarettes. Once the district commandant of the NKVD came to the village, and I went with my aunt to see him. The "AUTHORITY" looked us over with his beady eyes and growled: "I don't know anything new about your husband. I can tell you only that he is a major criminal." My aunt objected: "How can he be a 'major criminal?' I have lived with him for the past 16 years and have known his every move. I would have known if he had committed any crime." The officer remained unconvinced: "You lived with him 16 years and you did not know him. We got to know him through and through, and we know that he is quite 'a bird.'" The "audience" was over.

During the first days of December (1943) we had proof that the Polish Embassy, despite its leaving Soviet Union, had not forgotten the Polish citizens it left behind. Poles in the Soviet Union started getting individual parcels from abroad from names and addresses of senders totally unknown to the addressees. There were two types of packages: food parcels containing vegetable fat, powdered milk, powdered pea soup and dried fruit, and parcels containing enough material for a suit. Many food parcels came to our district but parcels with material were addressed only to Stefan, my uncle, Steve and to pani Helena, the girls' former tutor. Her address was unknown and the post office returned her package to the sender. We notified Stefan by mail about the arrival of a parcel for him.

Since the money orders from the Australian Mission were addressed to my uncle, we used to "manufacture" power of attorney certificates written in my uncle's handwriting including his signature. My aunt just filled in her first name and surname in the proper places. We explained to Anna Pavlovna, who in her official capacity had to attest to my uncle's signature with a round seal, that he had left several written and signed certificates. Actually Steve forged those documents by making carbon paper copies from an old one. Personally I did not want to have anything to do with it. Steve, on the other hand, was of the opinion that sooner or later we would all be imprisoned, so this forgery would make no difference in the anticipated verdict of no fewer than ten years at hard labor in a prison camp.

Stefan arrived to pick up the package addressed to him as soon as he received our letter. He brought meat, white bread, sugar and honey with him as gifts and spent the whole day with us. He was pleased with his life on "his collective farm" and had even gotten married there. For the night he went to the Goldbergs' and did not bother to stop at the Kalmans'. Stefan was a good-natured, sharp and shrewd fellow and typical "macho" type. In his present domicile, where there were three men and several women, he was in his glory. Stefan was deeply upset by my uncle's arrest as well as by the other arrests among the Polish population in our district. Nevertheless he retained a rather optimistic outlook on life.

For our part we did everything we could to intervene on behalf of my uncle and to get some news from him or about him. We sent letters to Wanda Wasilewska, the Chairperson of the Union of Polish Patriots, to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Kalinin, to the Legal Department of the UPP, to the Australian Mission, and to the provincial NKGB (*Narodnyi Komissariat Gosudarstvennoi Bezopastnosti*, the Soviet equivalent of the Ministry for State Security). My uncle's case was either in the hands of NKGB or the Military Prosecutor's Office since both were in charge of political matters. All of our letters remained unanswered. Furthermore, our numerous letters to friends also remained unanswered. There was no question that our lines of communication with the outside world and *vice versa* had been effectively blocked by the authorities.

The year was 1944 and a particularly severe Russian winter. Steve and I worked on the collective farm sorting wheat and rye for the spring seeding. We carried 50- pound sacks with grain from a granary to the sorting machine and then carried the sorted grain back to another granary. One ton of grain was sorted daily which amounted to 20 sacks per person carried to and from the sorting machine. The machine was manually operated by a woman turning a crank. Since the work was tiring, the two women operators who were assigned to sorting the grain took turns every two sacks. We worked without a dinner break because the days were short, and we preferred to get home early. In the morning before starting work, we had to shovel snow away from the entrances to the granaries, cut paths and steps in the snowbanks to make it easier to carry the heavy sacks over the ten-foot snowdrifts, a particularly difficult task in slippery felt boots.

Sometimes Maks worked with us, but usually he carted the grain to the elevator. The collective farm was still fulfilling its tax obligations for 1943 at this late date.

There was neither news from my uncle nor news about him. From time to time I took the 18-kilometer (11-mile) walk to Koshki to see the NKGB commandant and to try to get some information. Every time I went to see him I was deathly afraid that he would not let me leave the red brick building housing the NKGB and every time the "audience" took the same form. After waiting for at least an hour, I was let into the commandant's office. He looked me over with his penetrating beady eyes and hissed through his teeth: "You here about X's case? I don't know anything. You will be notified when I get some information." He never graced me with a goodbye. I walked back through the snow covered fields looking around for wandering wolves. I repeated the trek to Koshki every 7-10 days because we felt it was more likely that my uncle would die before the NKGB would notify us about his fate. Every time I went to see the commandant his answer answer was the same.

My aunt despaired even though many people tried to allay her fears and premonitions by explaining to her that her husband was undoubtedly interned and probably living relatively well. One of those who believed in this possibility was Mr. Goldberg's friend, a Jewish tailor who had been evacuated from Kiev and who lived with his big family in a neighboring Chuvash village. He claimed to have many influential acquaintances in Koshki and once even suggested that we talk to the only lawyer practicing there. "He is an experienced lawyer." The tailor said with conviction. "He was imprisoned for two years."

So one morning I set out for Koshki to see the lawyer. After many inquiries I found him in his office which he shared with a notary public in a wooden building housing the People's Court. The office was a small room too narrow to turn around in it because of the single desk which occupied most of the space. The two men took turns at the desk depending on who had a client. Both men wore fur coats, fur hats and woolen mittens because, like the rest of the courthouse, their office was unheated and one could see the steam coming out of people's nostrils. When I asked which one of the two was the lawyer, the one sitting on a chair by the window got up and approached the desk. The notary public vacated the desk and moved to the chair by the window. I told the lawyer the reason for my visit. He had heard about the case and had heard my uncle's name mentioned. The lawyer shook his head sadly because he could not accept the case. In political cases and especially in those before a military tribunal, the counsel for defense was appointed by the court. Nevertheless he promised to find out where my uncle was being held and took down our address in order to contact us.

Again I was returning home from Koshki empty handed and without hope. I knew the road by heart: a white endless plane with the buildings of the Pogruznaya railroad station on the horizon. Then after walking one kilometer along a hedge which protected the train track from the blowing snow, the buildings of Little Sergeyevka were visible far on the horizon. After passing Little Sergeyevka located about halfway between Pogruznaya and our village, I turned onto a road leading across the fields and could already see Sergeyevka. Sometimes a sleigh passed me but it was very seldom that the driver offered a lift. The most frequent riders were collective farm chairmen or other VIPs whose excuse was that "the horse would get tired." When a farmer rode in a sleigh drawn by an ox, it did not pay to hitch a ride unless it was a matter of resting because one could walk faster. At any rate the cold was so severe that walking at least kept one warm.

Weeks passed with no news from my uncle or letters from our friends and acquaintances. Finally my aunt stopped writing so as not to make them suspect in the eyes of the NKGB. Only I wrote post cards regularly every fortnight to my aunt and uncle in the USA. In my writing I resorted to a secret code in order to inform them about what had taken place and what our situation was like. In that code I used my first and middle names and the first names of my parents and grandparents, both paternal and maternal, when making references to myself, to my uncle, or to his family. A few months later when the court passed a sentence on my uncle, my post cards resembled mathematical problems with several unknown terms. Nevertheless everything was perfectly clear to my American relatives.

Our family's overall conditions had been deteriorating with every passing day. The supply of flour Steve and I had earned from threshing in the summer and fall ran out. The potatoes we had dug out of our plot of land also ran out. Very few items of clothing remained for sale and barter, because I had taken

a lot to the NKGB for my uncle. As evacuees we were entitled to 2.8 kg (a little over 6 pounds) of flour for an adult and 3.5 kg (close to 8 pounds) for Kathy per month from the *Sel'po* store. The flour was of such poor quality that my aunt basically baked bread out of potatoes and used the flour for leavening in a 1:3 ratio of flour to potatoes. Both the flour and the potatoes had to be purchased from farmers, Aunt Masha, the miller's wife and from the collective farm's bookkeeper. Because of the severe winter, the poor harvest in 1943, high taxes and the overall state deficit, prices were inflated. A pound of flour cost 75-90 *rubles*, 1 lb of potatoes 15 *rubles*, 1 lb of butter 100 *rubles* and 1 lb of mutton 30 *rubles*. At that time the official rate of exchange was \$1=5.3 rubles. We bartered the cloth we had received in a parcel the previous fall for 3 lbs of butter, 40 lbs of potatoes, 20 lbs of flour and 60 quarts of milk (at 10 rubles a quart). But our family consumed 40 lbs of potatoes weekly! We used fat (butter or mutton tallow) to season the potato soup which we ate twice daily. The only advantage of the Russian winter was that two daily meals satisfied our needs, because the days were short. In order to save fuel the soup was prepared in the evening in a larger amount to have some left for breakfast when it was warmed up on bits of straw brought home on the way from work the previous evening. The straw was fine, wet, mixed with manure and smelled of sheep urine but it served the purpose; it burned.

Our day started at dawn. My aunt and pani Pola, who had lived with us since her return from the prison camp, were the first to get up and they immediately began warming up the soup. One of them fed the straw into the oven and blew on it to have it catch fire and burn while the other one mixed the soup so that it would not stick to the pot. Steve and I were the next to get up. We slept in one bed and with woolen underwear under our pyjamas, so there was no problem with getting dressed. We just took off our pyjamas and pulled on our pants, shirts, sweaters and the Eisenhower jackets. We washed up before getting dressed but without taking off our woolen undershirts because it was cold in the room. Only every few days when it became necessary to wash our necks, did we take off the woolen undershirts and then only for a very brief moment. Kathy was the last one to get up. With her teeth chattering she snuggled up to the warm oven. After everyone "washed up" we ate breakfast: a bowl of soup, a piece of bread and a mug of hot water whitened with a little milk for Steve, pani Pola and myself. My aunt and Kathy detested soup so their breakfast consisted of a piece of very thinly buttered bread and a mug of hot water whitened with a little milk and sometimes slightly sweetened when we had sugar (a half-pound of sugar was the monthly ration for a child when it was available at the *Sel'po* store).

Then Kathy was shipped off to school. She loved school; no matter what the weather or how she felt healthwise, she would not miss class. My aunt dressed Kathy in a ski outfit, a short sheepskin jacket which my uncle had brought from the Embassy, a shawl which covered her head and the upper part of her body, and warm mittens also "courtesy" of the Polish Embassy. Kathy carried her books and a pencil case in a knapsack which I had fashioned from a bag for a Polish army gas mask. Steve and I left for work with Kathy unless work was called off because of a raging snow storm. Before leaving for work Steve and I brought water from a well situated about 150 feet from the cabin. When we returned home at 3:00 p.m., dinner was ready: soup, a piece of bread and a mug of hot water whitened with a little milk. My aunt cooked three kinds of soup alternately: potato soup with traces of groats, potato soup with little balls made of flour mixed with water (dumplings?) and plain potato soup. A pot of soup was seasoned with a fried slice of onion (1 lb of onions cost 60 *rubles*). It was no wonder that when I got married in the United States many years later, I warned my wife never ever to make potato soup because the moment she served it, I would leave her alone with the soup and never return. Through the many years of our marriage we never ate potato soup.

After dinner I helped Kathy with her homework. Later in the evening Maks visited us or Steve and I went to his place. Around nine o'clock we went to bed, actually a plank bed which Steve had put together out of some short boards the previous summer. We used only to take off our outer clothes and put on pyjamas over our underwear. There was no washing up in the evening. On Sundays, however, the "major washing up" took place; *i.e.* splashing in a 1½-foot diameter and half-foot deep sheet metal basin placed next to a lightly warm oven. One was afraid to move a few inches away from the oven because of temperature difference between that spot and the rest of the room.

One day we were working with Uncle Grisha, the father of the deaf Mikhala. Uncle Grisha was in great spirits, because he had finished building his *banya* (Russian bathhouse). He put it together after work, spending every minute of his free time on building it. Several years before, when Uncle Grisha

moved to Sergeyevka from the neighboring village, he had brought the beams and the boards with him and had stored them in a stable next to his cabin. When the three of us were returning from work, the old man invited us for a bath saying: "Come for a bath, lads. Today my old woman is heating the bathhouse for the first time so you can take advantage of it. Maybe my son is suffering somewhere at the front and someone took pity on him and invited him to a *banya*." We were touched by Uncle Grisha's generosity and could not pass up an opportunity for a decent bath. Steve maintained that such a bath would suffice us for a month. As it turned out it sufficed us for a whole lifetime because we would never dare to go again to a Russian *banya*. Of course, I can only speak for myself but have no doubt that Steve would not be tempted to repeat that experience either.

At 6 o'clock that evening we took two towels and a piece of soap, and went to Uncle Grisha's *banya*. The *banya* was a small hut 9 x 9 ft and a little over 5 ft high. It was windowless and had no chimney. As we approached the hut Mikhala had just finished undressing in the snow outside. "Undress and get in!" He yelled disappearing behind the hut's door. "Are you getting undressed here?" I asked Steve. "Because I will do it inside." Steve agreed with me. Taking off every bit of clothing in +5°F was an invitation to catching pneumonia. We opened the door and entered the *banya*. Inside the heat and steam which were mixed with carbon monoxide were unbearable and we simply could not breathe. We felt that we would immediately asphyxiate and only the opportunity for a thorough bath prevented us from leaving the *banya*. I had an additional problem because being over 6 ft tall I had to keep my head down and was getting a stiff neck. In the light of a small flame from a *koptilka* (a kerosene lamp without the glass chimney) we noticed Mikhala and Uncle Grisha sitting on a bench and leaning against one wall. "Hang your clothes above the hearth and start soaping yourselves." The old man said.

We ripped off our clothes and hung them on a bar above the stone hearth. "Steve!" I groaned. "Let's sit down. Maybe it is cooler on the floor. According to the laws of physics hot air rises but cooler air stays down." Despite the laws of physics the difference in temperature was imperceptible. Uncle Grisha pushed a basin with water toward us while he and Mikhala hit each other with little birch brooms. It was beastly hot. "Mikhala! More steam!" Uncle Grisha ordered his son. Steve and I were too weak to protest. We washed up but moved slowly like flies in honey. Mikhala grabbed a cup with water and emptied it on the hot stones. In a flash hot steam filled the *banya*. Now Steve and I were breathing through our mouths like fish out of water. We wanted to run out but had to rinse off the soapsuds. I had not taken off my eyeglasses, because there was no place to put them down; it felt like the frame was melting on my nose. Mikhala started passing out but managed to crawl to the door. Fortunately Uncle Grisha's wife opened the door at that moment to ask him something and pulled Mikhala outside into the snow by his hair. After a little while Steve and I decided that if we remained any longer we would simply die. We grabbed our clothes which were burning hot, pulled on our pants and jackets over our wet bodies and jumped out barefoot into the snow holding on to the rest of our clothes. Mikhala was stretched out in the snowbank naked and his mother was rubbing his face with the snow.

Steve and I put on our felt boots and dragged ourselves home. My aunt almost passed out when she saw the two of us. Steve dropped on the bed, closed his eyes and didn't open them or move for an hour. I plopped on a chair and it took a half an hour before I came to and could dress. Thus ended my first and last visit to a Russian *banya*.

The Darkening Clouds

At the end of February 1944, a woman came to Sergeyevka from the collective farm where Stefan lived and brought the news that Stefan, another Pole and pani Maria had been arrested. Pani Maria, a former employee of the Home for Polish Invalids, had settled in that village after having been released from a prison camp for her refusal to accept a Soviet passport. Steve, Maks and I got the jitters. My uncle's case began to look very serious. The NKGB commandant in Koshki continued his mysterious silence. Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, and Maria Alexandovna, the school principal, were called to Kuibyshev by the NKGB. Pani Mila, the former baker in the Home who was working as an aid in the Indom as well as pani Hanka, the cook, were also called to Koshki for questioning. The Koshki NKGB commandant came to Sergeyevka several times and questioned various individuals. The same thing was happening in other Polish centers and the ex-mistress of the Polish Embassy's warehouse manager, Piotrowski, spent weeks in Kuibyshev. There was no doubt that these were the witnesses for the prosecution because in the Soviet judicial system no witnesses for the defense were ever called to testify.

As if all this was not enough, pani Justynka, the "fortune teller," who had gone for a few days to Meleless to take a food parcel to her charge, Marysia, who was incarcerated in a prison camp, brought back the news that Messrs. Dunin and Kochanski had been sentenced to death and were already on "death row" waiting to be shot. When they appealed their sentences to Kalinin, the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, the sentences were commuted to 25 years at hard labor in a prison camp. She also brought the news that Father Wladyslaw and Henryk had been found in one of the districts in the Ulyanovsk Province and arrested. A Pole who was in hiding to avoid being drafted into the Polish Army organized by the UPP was also arrested in Koshki and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for desertion. The overall situation was tense. Steve, Maks and I expected to be arrested at any moment.

Actually we did not have time to worry about our fate, because we had to face more pressing matters. Our landlady, Aunt Styosha, who had moved to her daughter's house in one of the neighboring villages, showed up one day, discovered the disappearance of a tremendous amount of potatoes from her cellar, and accused us of stealing her potatoes. The truth was that Vitya, her son who lived with us, sold her potatoes and bought vodka with the money. Aunt Styosha's accusations reached the management of the village and of the collective farm. Neither the mayor nor the chairman of the collective believed her accusations, but we had to move out. Across the street stood a decrepid cabin with a leaky roof so we moved into it after having assured the village "authorities" that we would vacate the premises and even live on the street if they needed the place. On the other hand we knew full well that according to the Soviet law nobody could be thrown out of their living quarters in wintertime. We could have remained at Aunt Styosha's but she was so enraged that we decided against it.

Our food reserves and items of clothing to barter for food were disappearing rapidly. Sergey Stepanovich, the chairman of the collective farm, even refused to give out the flour earmarked for the horses because with the approaching end of winter the supplies of fodder were dwindling. All through the winter the horses were fed straw with a minimal addition of hay. In anticipation of the spring sowing the hay ration was increased, each horse also received 2 kg (5 pounds) of oats daily and the straw was sprinkled with flour so that by sowing time the horses would be stronger. However, the animals were so debilitated that even an improved feeding regimen did not do much good.

One day Maks came for a visit and shortly after his arrival the foreman, Uncle Misha, popped in saying to me: "I order you and Maks to cart grain to the elevator." Steve was away for several days because he had gone with a few young farm boys to Salavan to prepare firewood for the collective. This way there was one fewer mouth to feed at home. I did not want to go and leave the women alone. Furthermore we expected news from my uncle momentarily, and I could be needed. As soon as Uncle Misha left Maks started pestering me to take a small sack for grain. I objected and told him I would not steal grain and then go to prison for it. It was enough that one family member was already in jail. My aunt sided with Maks and became quite insistent. Consequently, I had to give in. Otherwise it would have meant that "I did not take care of the family."

Maks was experienced in carting grain to the elevator. When entering it and weighing the loaded wagon, he always managed to press the scale's platform either with the tip of his shoe or with the end of

his whip. Consequently, the weight was higher than the actual weight. In truth he had removed some grain into his own sack and hid it in the bushes at the side of the road. On the way back with the empty wagon he retrieved his sack with stolen grain and dropped it off at home. This time the matter was even simpler because Zhenia, the granary manager, who always carefully watched the weighing of the sacks with the grain, left for a few moments and Maks managed to add a 40-lb bucket of grain to one of the sacks which had been already weighed.

After hitching the horses to our sled and loading the sacks on them we started on our way. The day was beastly cold and for most of the way we walked to keep warm. Uncle Misha assigned the strongest horses to us for this job, but as they were pregnant mares and they could miscarry, we were prohibited from rushing them. If a pregnant mare miscarried, it would mean a five-year prison term for the carter (and not for the mare!). When we approached the hedge along the railroad track before the Pogruznaya station, we stopped and Maks looked around to make sure that the road was empty. Then he transferred some of the grain from one of the sacks to my sack which he buried under the snow in the bushes. We continued on to the elevator where we turned in our load. Its weight corresponded to that listed on the shipping bill issued by the collective farm. On the way back Maks dug out the sack and hid it under straw in his sled. Our next problem was how to proceed with the stolen grain. After all, we could not arrive with it at the stable. It was necessary to hide the sack somewhere close to Sergeyevka and retrieve it at night. I told Maks that I did not want to have anything to do with the whole scheme, and he could do with the grain whatever he damn pleased. Maks hid the sack under one of the bridges leading to Sergeyevka.

We returned home before dusk and after supper, when it got dark, Maks and Nusya came to pick me up. We were to go together and retrieve the sack. I categorically refused. My aunt was obviously displeased with my stand. I told her that I had no desire to be imprisoned, did not need bread baked out of that grain, and if she wished she could go with Maks. My aunt was not the one to take risks. Consequently, Maks and Nusya decided to go for that f sack. As they were leaving I told Maks not to dare to bring it to us, because I would throw him out and empty the sack into an abandoned well next to our cabin. They brought it to their cabin, and the next day Maks took it to the windmill where Uncle Peter exchanged it for 8 kg (18 pounds) of flour. When Maks arrived in our cabin to divide the flour in two halves I left. After that I had the jitters for seven days and could not sleep at night, because I was afraid that the theft would be discovered. Fortunately it was not and my aunt and Kathy had bread. I did not eat any and stuck to my word.

Maks and Nusya visited us every day. It was difficult to ignore the fact that she was in her last months of pregnancy. Maks declared that the baby was due in May and tried to convince me and Steve, who had returned from the forest, that his calculations were correct. Maks sounded so convincing that we actually had to count on our fingers. Fortunately humans are not elephants whose pregnancies last 24 months, so the fingers on two hands were sufficient to prove that Maks must have known Nusya several months prior to her arrival in Sergeyevka.

One day in the second half of March (1944), Uncle Misha flew into our cabin like a fury and ordered me to ride with Maks and bring grain for our *Sel'po* store. I immediately started getting dressed when Maks arrived with the details of our assignment. We were to bring oats from a village 35 km (22 miles) away from Sergeyevka. Nusya's parents lived 5 km (3 miles) beyond that village. We decided to stay with them for the night, load the grain next morning and return home. About halfway, at the "Engels Collective Farm," we were to feed our horses. Our collective farm provided 1 kg (2 pounds) of bread for each of us and 2 kg (4 pounds) of oats for each horse. Again Uncle Misha assigned two of the best horses for the job, although each looked like a skeleton. We selected the best harness, checked our sleds to make sure they were not broken and that their shafts would not pop out, harnessed the horses, loaded the straw and hay on the sleds and started on our way. Maks was familiar with the road, because once before he had taken it to bring grain. That time he ended up short 8 kg (close to 18 lbs). Now he threatened to knock storehouse manager's teeth out if she cheated in the weighing of the grain and described for me the scrumptious supper at his in-laws.

The day was not too cold, but the dampness of the approaching spring thaw was very penetrating. About 4 km (2.5 miles) beyond Sergeyevka the road cut across a gully. Our horses took off while Maks and I held on for dear life to our sleds which seemed to be flying through the air. We passed two villages

and after a 2.5-hour ride entered the "Engels Collective Farm." Maks steered his sled toward the cabin occupied by pan Rafal, our cell mate from the Koshki prison and a friend of Father Wladyslaw. Pan Rafal was happy to see us. We loosened our horses' harness, gave them some straw with hay and went inside.

The cabin had been nicely kept by its previous German owners. Its walls were painted with an oil base paint. Well, solidly built pigsties, a cow shed and a stable were all under one roof. While we rolled cigarettes and chatted with pan Rafal, his wife put a pot with potatoes on the fire. After a while redheaded Yudka, Father Wladyslaw's friend dropped in. Of course our conversation revolved around those who had been arrested. The NKVD did not stop snooping around the "Engels Collective Farm" even though the priest and Henry had already been detained. There was no news from them and the Poles traveling to Kuibyshev could not find any trace of them. Redheaded Yudka, after having lost his friend, Father Wladyslaw, married a Russian woman who had born him a son a few days before our arrival. Since pan Rafal's wife had seen the baby, I asked her if the baby was a redhead and freckled like the father. It did not seem necessary to ask if the baby was also toothless. After having potatoes with our bread and finishing another cigarette, we watered our horses, said goodbye to our pleasant hosts and started on our way. We had to promise to stop over on our way back.

There was more traffic on the road beyond the "Engels Collective Farm," because the highway lead to Kuibyshev. We passed sleds loaded with mountains of hay and peasants in long heavy sheepskin coats (*tulupy*) walking alongside. In the opposite direction lumbered sleds pulled by oxen and loaded with wood from a forest 5 miles distant from the collective farm. A strong wind mixed with wet snow started blowing as we approached Yelshovka, the administrative center of the neighboring district. The snow blew straight in our faces blinding the horses which moved slowly and carefully along the snow-covered road. We traveled in the snow storm for almost two hours afraid of getting lost. Finally it stopped snowing and started getting dark. Another 6 miles was left to Maks' in-laws. We rushed our horses because the area was full of gullies and we worried about encountering wolves. To make things worse our clothes were wet and the evening cold chilled us to the bones. Finally around 6 o'clock in the evening we arrived at Nusya's parents.

They lived in a dugout and not in a true cabin. Only a thatched roof and small windows were above the ground level. Maks explained to me that Nusya's father had been considered a rich peasant and during the collectivization in 1929-1930 was evicted from his house and ordered to live in a dugout. Maks went inside and after a while came out with his father-in-law, an old blind man with long snow-white hair and beard. We unharnessed our horses and Grandfather Pavel, despite his blindness, led them into a small stable built of osier and covered with a thatched roof. It was the "living quarters" of the family's goat who for this night graciously (?) gave up her space to the guests and was moved inside the dugout where she was tied to the door. Maks' mother-in-law remembered me from her daughter's wedding and was very glad to have us visit with them. She immediately put out food on the table and started the *samovar*. Maks had to describe to Grandfather Pavel what I looked like and this way the old man formed a picture of the person in his mind. Grandfather Pavel looked like a saint on a Byzantine icon.

The supper was truly exquisite. Meat stewed with potatoes, cabbage soup and tea with honey. The old couple asked about Nusya, about my uncle who was known to them from Maks' stories, about the life in our collective farm, etc. In turn Grandfather Pavel talked about the collectivization, about the life of the Russian peasantry before Lenin's death and before the collectivization, etc. Before going to sleep we watered our horses at the nearby well. Actually Maks did the watering, and I just held them because it was too dark, and I could not see. The bed was too short for me and Nusya's mother made it up for Maks, while I slept on a thick *tulup* (sheepskin coat) on the floor covered with my jacket.

The next day Nusya's mother got up before dawn and prepared breakfast. Maks and I also got up before sunrise, washed our faces and hands in ice cold water, and had breakfast which consisted of hot cereal with milk, unskinned boiled potatoes and tea sweetened with honey. We watered our horses, said goodbye to the hospitable old couple and started on our way to the next village to pick up the oats. It was quite cold and our rested horses snorted and trotted merrily especially because the road ran down a gentle slope. After a few minutes we stopped at the warehouses where we were to load the grain. Maks went to get the warehouse manager and returned with a pretty 16-year old girl, the manager's daughter. Needless to say he was not about to argue with the girl about having been shortchanged during his

previous visit but watched her like a hawk as she weighed the oats. We tied each sack very carefully and tightly so that none of them would open in transit. It was not easy to tie the sacks with bast cords because the cold numbed our hands. Maks decided that we would stop for dinner at Nysya's sister's home. Her husband worked as a blacksmith in a village located 8 km (5 miles) before the "Engels Collective Farm." Now our horses walked slowly since each was pulling a 250-kg (550-pound) load and, furthermore, the sun was rising above the horizon. As it got warmer, the snow began sticking to sleds' runners.

The road to the village where Maks' sister-in-law and her husband lived led across a bridge at the bottom of a gully. As we approached the edge of it, our hearts sank. There was not a trace of snow on the bridge, but only mud and manure. The road up the hill on the other side of the gully was also covered with manure. Only a few patches of snow were visible on either side of the road. "Our horses won't make it." Maks remarked offhandedly. I agreed sulkily and added after a while: "Again our felt boots will get soaked." "Nothing can be done about it." Maks muttered. Our situation was hardly envious. We knew full well that our horses even by gaining momentum while galloping down the slope would not be able to pull their loads any farther than the middle of the bridge. Consequently, on the bridge we would have to transfer all sacks to one sled and use the second one for transporting them, one at a time, to the top of the hill where the sack would be unloaded onto the snow and the empty sled brought back to the bridge to pick up the next sack. We had ten 50-lb sacks which meant nine round trips up- and down the hill plus loading the sacks standing in the mud. Well, there was no other solution! Beating his horse mercilessly Maks was the first to ride down. His sled stopped exactly in the middle of the bridge splashing mud in all directions. I followed him and my sled stopped right next to his. We decided to use his horse which was the stronger of the two to transport the individual sacks. By the time we were through with that job, and had divided the sacks five to a sled and started on our way again, we were soaked with perspiration and from the water which had splashed inside of our felt boots. We did not sit on the sleds but walked alongside so as not to get chilled and catch colds.

Somehow by one o'clock in the afternoon we managed to arrive at Maks' sister-in-law. She felt sorry for our horses being fed straw and brought out some hay for them. We went inside the cabin which was full of little kids. Nysya's sister, a pale skinny Russian woman, was preparing dinner. Her husband came home from the smithy shortly, and we sat down around the table. A bottle of vodka appeared from somewhere, and we alternated drinking vodka with eating cabbage soup and meat stewed with potatoes. Our conversation centered around the arrested Poles, news from the fronts, and living conditions on the collective farms. Two and one-half hours later we left for Sergeyevka accompanied by the "Come back!" invitations of our hosts.

Now the road was very difficult and our horses moved slowly. By the time we arrived at the "Engels Collective Farm" it was already getting dark. We stopped for a short time in one of the cabins on the edge of the village where Maks went in to say hello to some of Nysya's relatives and then drove to pan Rafal's. We transferred the sacks from our sleds to the hallway in pan Rafal's cabin so that they would not be stolen overnight. Pan Rafal unhitched our horses and led them into his stable. Inside the cabin supper was already on the table. A few days earlier pan Rafal had slaughtered a young pig which he had raised through the winter. So now we had meat and potatoes for supper. Afterwards we discussed various topics, tried to imagine the end of the war, our return to Poland, etc. Pan Rafal's wife spread some coats on the floor for us to sleep on and we covered ourselves with blankets that were "courtesy of the Polish Embassy." Our felt boots were placed in the Russian oven where they were to dry.

The next morning we got up at dawn and after a breakfast of bread and milk started on our way in order to take advantage of the frozen roads. It was noontime when we returned to Sergeyevka. The *Sel'po* saleswoman told us to take the grain straight to the windmill. Uncle Peter weighed the sacks and now we had 8 kg (17.6 lbs) extra. "Come back tomorrow," Uncle Peter said. "And I will give you 8 kg of oat flour. It will come in handy, and the *Sel'po* won't know the difference." That was a windfall gain and, needless to say, we were very happy about it. Uncle Peter told us that Nina, who had been working in Stalingrad since May 1943, had returned home that morning. I went inside the house to congratulate Aunt Masha. She looked ten years younger than usual. "She is so skinny and worn out." Aunt Masha was saying about Nina with tears streaming down her cheeks. "Thank God, she is home. Now we will have to see to it that she will not be dragged to court. You know how it is." Of course, I did. The Soviet people lived in the constant fear

of trials and imprisonment. The prison camps and prisons had become proverbial and almost a part of the Russian folklore. People used to say *Kto nye byl to budyet, a kto byl to nye zabudyet* (Who has not been imprisoned, will be. Who has been in prison will never forget the experience.), or *Tuda dvyer shiroka, a od tuda uzyenkaya* (The gate leading into a prison is wide, but the gate leading out of a prison is very, very narrow.), and then there was a typically Russian fatalistic saying *Ot tyurmy i ot sudby nye spasyoshsya* (One cannot escape either imprisonment or fate.).

I met Nina the next evening in the collective's club. It was housed in a large wooden building inside walls decorated with patriotic slogans. The hall was cold, heated only before official meetings and only by a single stove. The club was managed by Niura, an evacuee from Moscow and the sister-in-law of the village mayor. With the approaching springtime there was relatively little work on the farm, so the club stayed open both Saturday and Sunday evenings. A lighted kerosene lamp placed on one of the club's window sills signaled to the village youngsters that the club was open. Groups of boys, girls and the village intelligentsia, the teachers, drifted to the club. Frequently a boy brought his *balalayka* and the postmistress her guitar and they played while the rest of the people danced. The most popular repertoire were folk songs called *chastushki* accompanied by a form of dancing. *Chastushki* consisted of four-line stanzas. A boy or a girl would jump into the middle of the floor, sing a stanza meant as a challenge to a boy or a girl from among those sitting around, then would go through a few dance movements accompanied by the stomping of feet and finish with a loud stomp in front of the selected individual. The challenged person could not refuse, but had to jump into the center of the floor, sing a stanza-response, go through the dance movements and now it was again the first dancer's turn. The performance was like a "song duel." The collection of those *chastushki* seemed to be unlimited and a "song duel" could sometimes continue for a half-hour. In addition to the *chastushki* some other folk songs were particularly favored by the village youth at that time.

But the fun did not actually start until Kolka arrived with the collective farm's accordion. Kolka was a new member of the collective who had recently joined it with his wife Tanya. A 20-year old Chuvash with a pockmarked face, he was excused from any further service in the army, because his right elbow had been injured by a bullet. Nevertheless the injury did not interfere with his playing the accordion. Now he took turns with the accordion player from the Indom in providing dance music at the club. Kolka's Russian repertoire was limited to a few folk dances, while his knowledge of "West European" dances was even more limited: one "one-step," one waltz and two polkas. An important deficiency of Kolka's playing was his inability to use the proper rhythm when playing the "one-step" or the waltz. Consequently during the "one-step" the dancing couples moved like flies in molasses while during the waltz they spun with the speed of an airplane propeller. The girls from the Indom also danced the Russian *kozachok*, the Ukrainian *trepak*, the Caucasian *lesginka* and *kabardinka* and (hard to imagine!) ... *pas d'espagne*. However, they had to accompany themselves by singing because Kolka did not know those melodies.

The *pas d'espagne* was particularly fashionable and even the Chuvash girls who were dressed in long thickly gathered checkered skirts loved that dance of our great grandmothers. According to the custom of the Russian countryside girls danced with girls and boys with boys. The village intelligentsia, however, wanted to dance the "West European" dances with the three of us; i.e. Maks, Steve and me. In the days past when the Home for Polish Invalids was in existence, there were many good dancers among its residents and among the Poles in the village, but all of those had been drafted into the UPP's Polish Army and only the true invalids remained in the Indom.

Undisputably the best dancing partner was Nina, the miller's daughter. Despite having a rather plump figure she danced very lightly and very gracefully. Steve and I decided that one of the teachers was the second best. We felt obliged to dance at least once with each of the girls. It was they who asked us for a dance and not *vice versa*. Any evasion on our part could lead to dire results. For example, I remember one time during the first evening after Nina's return from Stalingrad that I kept her company, and we danced a few times. Because the dancing did not last long that evening, I missed a dance with our postmistress. The next morning I went to the post office to read newspapers. I picked up one of them as I had done every morning before, but the postmistress told me not to touch anything. Surprised I put down the paper and waited in case there was any mail for me. The postmistress handed all the mail to the girl mail carrier who then handed me my mail. When I stopped at Maks' and Nusya's that evening, the

postmistress also came for a visit and immediately reproached me: "Last night you were so busy with Nina that you did not ask me for a single dance!" Now I understood why she had been so mad at me that morning and promised myself to be a "good boy" the next time.

At the end of the week our post office received a small supply of post cards. It was a rare event and I was particularly interested in acquiring some because every fortnight I used to mail a post card to my relatives in the United States. It was my belief that a post card was more convenient for writing abroad, because the censor could rapidly read it, rather than spend time opening and resealing an envelope. Furthermore, there were no envelopes to be had, and I was afraid that an envelope made out of a piece of some scrap paper and sealed with glue made from flour and water mixture would not pass the censorship, because abroad it would present a negative picture of the Soviet Union. I asked the postmistress to sell me ten post cards, but she said that the limit was five. That evening there was dancing in the club, and I danced twice with the postmistress. The next morning she sold me twenty post cards and threw in with no charge two newspapers to cut up for rolling cigarettes. One had to have *blat* (pull) and, according to a Russian proverb, *Ne pomazhesh, ne poyedesh* (nothing can be accomplished without a grease job).

Days and weeks were passing by without any news from my uncle. The district NKVD commandant continued with his "I don't know" and there were no answers from Moscow to our numerous letters inquiring about my uncle. The residents of the Indom commemorated the anniversary of the Kosciuszko Uprising in 1794 with a meeting and a collection was taken up for the building of a tank called "The Avenger of Katyn." In the beginning of 1943, in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk, the Germans found mass graves of approximately 4500 Polish officers, prisoners of war, shot with a single bullet in the back of the head. Although the Soviet government blamed the Nazis for the massacre, there was evidence to the contrary.

The organizer of both the commemoration and the collection was one of the invalids, Mr. Ellengold, who had tuberculosis. For some time now he had enjoyed the authorities' trust and the invalids as well as the children referred to him jokingly as "our political chief" or "Leningold." He had become such an ardent communist (although in Poland before the war he had belonged to the Bund, the Jewish Socialist Party) that the District Party Committee had not sent a new *politruk* (political officer) to the Indom after the previous one, the redhead who had cooperated with the director in having my uncle arrested, was transferred to another post. None of the Poles living in Sergeyevka was invited to the meeting which commemorated that important event in the history of Poland, because in Mr. Ellengold's opinion we were all supporters of the London Government. However, the Soviet authorities in our village were all invited and accounted for. This was just one example of Mr. Ellengold's upbringing of the future Polish citizens in a democratic (read Bolshevik) spirit according to the slogans expounded in *Free Poland* and *New Horizons*, the journals published by the Union of Polish Patriots.

Actually the "democratization" started shortly after New Year 1944. One day the NKVD commandant arrived in Sergeyevka from Koshki and after a conference with his stoolies ordered all of the Poles to a meeting in the Indom. Young boys sent to each cabin and ordered: "Tell everybody to show up. No exceptions. I (*i.e.* the commandant) will also be there." That was sufficient for all of the Poles to show up even with infants in their arms. The commandant stood up and opened the meeting by saying: "According to the wishes of the Union of Polish Patriots you are to elect a representative. Think carefully and elect an individual who honestly and conscientiously will discharge his/her duties." Then he sat down. The women started whispering among themselves about voting for me. That was all I needed! I felt uneasy. Steve realized what was going to happen and immediately whispered to the nearest woman to spread the word not to be silly by endangering themselves and me. After a while the redhead *politruk* got up and proposed an invalid, Mr. Kozhukh: "He is a hard-working, capable and honest man, and he will discharge his duties splendidly." The audience was silent because there was no greater fool, know-nothing and sly individual among all of the Poles in our village. "Anyone against?" The *politruk* asked. The commandant stood up, turned toward the gathering and moved his eyes from one person to the next. No hands were raised. "Who is for the candidacy of Citizen Kozhukh?" The redhead continued the "democratic" elections. The commandant watched the audience. All hands shot up. Even the children who followed the proceedings with curiosity raised their hands. "Children under the age of 18 years have no right to vote." The commandant stated. "Citizen Kozhukh is elected unanimously." The meeting was

adjourned and the "hero of the day" did not even know about the luck and honor which had befallen him; he was busy seducing a Polish woman at the "Engels Collective Farm" where he had gone the previous day.

That summer the Red Army continued westward through Belorussia. The front moved west of Smolensk and the Soviet authorities immediately sent a Special Commission to the place of the mass murder of about 4500 Polish officer prisoners of war in the Katyn Forest. The bodies of the martyred officers were again exhumed. On the basis of depositions made by the same witnesses who had testified before the German Commission that Bolsheviks had been the murderers, and now appeared before the Special Commission, the latter issued a report accusing the Germans of this dastardly crime. The units of the new Polish Army in the Soviet Union gave military honors to the murdered victims. General Berling, surrounded by Soviet officers dressed in Polish uniforms, placed a wreath under a giant cross on the mass grave and called for the revenge of the Katyn murders. The majority of Poles in the Soviet Union considered the report issued by the Special Commission to be a whitewash. It was beyond any doubt that defenseless prisoners were murdered with a single bullet in the back of the head and that nobody had escaped to tell the world what had happened in the Katyn Forest. While only approximately 4500 bodies of Polish officers were found in mass graves in the Katyn Forest, approximately 11,000 more officers, NCO's, other military ranks, members of the Polish police and other individuals closely or remotely connected with the Polish prewar government remained unaccounted for. Maybe some day history would find out the truth about what had happened to those people. In the meantime all over the Soviet Union Poles were collecting money for the tank "The Avenger of Katyn" and the Indom participated in it on March 24, 1944.

In the first half of April (1944) Maks took Nusya to her parents because the baby was expected shortly and any day the thaw would make the roads become muddy and impassable. He returned on April 18 in soaked felt boots beaming from ear to ear. Nusya had delivered a baby boy and had named him after my uncle. That evening we celebrated with toasts of good health and good luck for the newborn boy and his parents. The next day, April 19th, Mr. Goldberg, the tailor, popped into our cabin, white as a sheet. His beard was shaking strangely and he barely managed to say that Maks had been arrested during the night. Steve and I looked at each other thinking "Whose turn is next?" When Mr. Goldberg regained his composure he told us what had happened. He was returning with milk from one of his Chuvash customers at the end of the village when a sled approached him and then sped on. Maks sat in the front and drove the horse while the NKVD commandant sat behind him holding a revolver at the ready. Mr. Goldberg stopped at Maks' landlady who said that during the night the NKVD commandant had come into the cabin, searched it, took a straight razor, some razor blades and a bar of soap which Maks had gotten in a parcel from his parents in Palestine. He took Maks with him and left a copy of the search report for Nusya. There was no question about it that the whole affair was premeditated, started and executed by the local authorities, but directed from Moscow, and was spreading out and dragging in new victims. The postmistress told me that the NKVD commandant had phoned every day to check whether or not Maks had returned from his in-laws.

With the rapidly approaching spring, ploughing was expected to start at the end of April. Our collective farm hired a new blacksmith and decided to assign the cabin in which we lived to him. Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, and the chairman of the collective could not care less where we would live. "There are so many of 'your people' in the village that they can put you up." The two of them used to say. "And if anyone will not do so, we will force them." The truth of the matter was that the cabins occupied by the Poles were already so overcrowded that we would be like sardines in a can if we were to move into any one of them. Mr. Goldberg, the tailor, offered us part of his room but it would not do us any good. After all there were four of us adults and Kathy. Finally my aunt got the bright idea to talk to Grusha, our former landlady who had put us up when we had been evicted from the Home and then we had to move out because Stepan Sergeyevich, the collective farm's chairman, wanted Grusha's cabin for himself. Grusha stuck to her rights as a "war widow" and Stepan Sergeyevich had found himself another place.

Grusha had problems of her own at that time. The previous summer (1943) when we had moved out of Grusha's, the district committees of the Party began sending convalescing service men from the military hospitals to the collective farms. Those people could not return to their villages which were still under German occupation, consequently, upon release from the hospitals they were sent to district towns

within a particular province and from there to collective farms for R. & R. Our village hosted a young lieutenant, Vanya, who had been shell shocked and buried in a foxhole. After several months in a military hospital he was considered to be cured. Vanya hailed from the environs of Minsk which was still under enemy occupation; he could not return to his village and was sent to Sergeyevka. The collective's administration put up Vanya at Grusha's and it was not difficult to guess that a very close and intimate relationship had blossomed between the two of them. After a fortnight Vanya felt completely at home. He loved to help in the fields and particularly to stand on the thresher and push sheafs into the machine. At those moments Vanya was like a madman: red in the face, screaming, jumping up and down and flapping his arms. Vanya was definitely not normal! He diligently attended all of the dancing in the club where, with the passion of a madman, he danced Russian folk dances and stomped so vigorously that splinters flew out of the floor boards. However, only Vanya's legs showed any signs of normalcy. His face was expressionless just like a mask with sweat pouring down it. Vanya always danced in his army greatcoat over a white army shirt with his arms hanging loosely like two pieces of a thick rope.

After four weeks Vanya announced his intention to marry Grusha. Even before the wedding he assumed the role of the future father to Grusha's five children and started bossing them around. One day Grusha went to the district town to pick up her "war widow's" pension: 100 *rubles*; i.e. 25 *rubles* for each child except the first one. She was to return the next day. That day Vanya secretly took an ax from the cabin, went in the direction of the Pogruznaya train station and laid in ambush in some bushes. When Grusha approached he hit her with the ax over the head, left the ax near the woman and went to some friends in Koshki. Passing peasants took the victim to the district hospital. After a few days Grusha regained consciousness and on the basis of her deposition the authorities easily arrested Vanya who was not hiding at all. After a few weeks Grusha left the hospital, and Vanya was shipped back to the front. Since that time she lived in constant fear that Vanya would return and kill her. Consequently, Grusha gladly accepted my aunt's idea of having us move in with her. She also felt compassion toward us on account of my uncle's situation because she liked him very much.

A few days before May Day, the second important holiday in the Soviet Union (the most important one being the anniversary of the October Revolution) Uncle Misha, the head foreman of our collective, came to Grusha's cabin where we had moved and told me to ride with the manager of the *Sel'po* to bring vodka for the holiday. "And don't forget to take some vessel for the vodka with you," he said as he was leaving. Being sent for vodka was the most profitable job in the collective farm. First of all one had the opportunity to steal a few liters and then sell them for 200 *rubles* a liter (in the store the price was 99 *rubles* but the amount one could purchase was limited). Secondly, one was entitled to buy any amount of vodka in the store without standing in line. Thirdly, one had plenty to eat when stopping on the way because the peasants would do and give anything for vodka. Finally, one could have one's fill of vodka during the trip.

I reported to the manager of the *Sel'po*, a stout Tatar woman who was also one of the schoolteachers. She familiarized me with details of the trip. The two of us were to take a large wagon with two barrels: one holding 500 liters (quarts) and the other one 200 liters. The 500-liter barrel, made out of wood, was used exclusively for hauling vodka. The 200-liter barrel, made out of iron, was used for hauling kerosene or vodka depending upon the need. The wagon was pulled by two horses: one from our stable and the other one on loan from Little Sergeyevka. The distillery was 70 km (44 miles) from our village. I went to the stable, greased the wheels of the wagon and hitched the two horses to it. They immediately started biting each other which meant trouble on the way. I stopped at our cabin, took a quarter loaf of bread and a 5-liter tea kettle made of sheet metal, the only "large capacity" vessel in our possession (the *Sel'po* manager also reminded me about taking an empty vessel and brought a 30-liter barrel herself), then I pulled up in front of the store to pick up my companion. It was well after noontime when we left Sergeyevka. The horses were biting each other and to make things worse, after we passed Little Sergeyevka, the borrowed horse wanted to return to his stable. I had to dissuade him by using my whip almost the whole way to the Pogruznaya station, a distance of about 12 km (7.5 miles). I thought my arm would fall off. After the station the horse stopped resisting but decided to vent his anger on our horse by biting his ears and his mane, and by trying to catch him by his nostrils. Never in my life had I seen such a mean beast! Again I had to use my whip to restrain him.

We passed Koshki at sunset and at dusk approached a wooden bridge damaged by the swollen

waters of a small river which during the summer was no wider than 3 feet. The bridge should have been closed to traffic. It was no more than 9 feet wide and had no railings. Holes in its surface posed a real threat to our horses who could easily fracture their legs. I had to admit that even in the daytime I would not have walked across that bridge. The evening set in by now and here we were crossing the bridge in the dark, with two horses biting each other and a large wagon loaded with two barrels. I tried to persuade my companion to return to Koshki for the night and to cross the bridge the next morning when it would be light, but she remained unmoved. We got off the wagon and each took a horse by its bridle. The animals pricked up their ears, snorted and were afraid to get onto the bridge. However, we pulled them with so much force that they finally gave in. Crossing that bridge was just short of a true disaster. The horses shoved each other, each trying to stay in the center of the bridge's surface, the pole between them swung wildly from side to side hitting their legs, frightening the animals and causing them to speed up. In the end my companion and I were dragged across that bridge hanging on to our horses' bridles for dear life. Finally we crossed the bridge and continued on our way in total darkness. After several hours my companion decided to stop overnight in a village. We pulled up to one of the cabins and she went inside. In a while she returned with a man who helped us unhitch our horses and lead them into a stable. We went inside the cabin and took off our wraps. The man's wife took a pot with cold boiled, unpeeled potatoes off of the stove and placed it in the middle of the table. We took out our bread and sat down to "supper." Our hosts tried to ingratiate themselves with us, because my companion had promised them we would stop for the night on our way back when we had the vodka. Two hours later I watered our horses. Then fully dressed we stretched out on the floor for the night. Although it was very stuffy inside of the cabin and cockroaches ran across the floor I immediately fell asleep.

The next morning after breakfast which again consisted of bread and potatoes we started on our way. All day long we spent sitting on the bumping wagon except for a two- hour break for dinner when we fed our horses. Every bone in my body was aching, and I had a splitting headache. The overnight stay in a village 8 km (5 miles) before the refinery was no different from our previous night. Early in the morning we started on the last leg of the road to the distillery. On the way the *Sel'po* manager acquainted me with the procedure for getting the vodka. At the distillery the warehouse manager would check the capacity of our barrels, give us a bucket and a large funnel, and tell us how many bucketfuls of water from a nearby well should be poured into each barrel. Then he would fill the barrels to the top with ethyl alcohol.

We arrived at the distillery which consisted of a few brick buildings. It turned out that there was no alcohol to be had. The manager of our *Sel'po* chased around for an hour intervening with various highly placed individuals with no success and we started on our way back empty handed. Again we stopped for the night in a village carefully avoiding those places where we had stayed at on our way to the distillery. After midnight on the second day we reached Koshki and stopped at my travel companion's friend's home for the night. They had no stable so I parked the wagon on the street, unhitched the horses, tied them to the wagon and gave them the leftover hay. Our hostess placed cold boiled potatoes on the table. That "supper" we washed down with cold water and after watering the horses I stretched out on the floor fully dressed. I was just falling asleep when I heard a horse neighing. "Go and see what happened." My companion said. I barely managed to pull on my felt boots when I heard a horse galloping away. I ran outside and, sure enough, only one horse was tied to the wagon. The borrowed beast had broken away and his triumphant neighing could be heard from a nearby alley. I ran into it but when the horse saw me he galloped away. There was no doubt that he sensed the proximity of his "home" stable and decided to return to it sooner. Mad as hell I went back inside. My travel companion did not get upset. "Nothing will happen to him," She remarked offhandedly. "He will return to his stable unless the wolves get him first." I decided to look for the escapee next day by directing my search toward his village.

I got up at dawn and, without eating breakfast, because I had finished my bread the previous evening and there were not even any leftover boiled potatoes, mounted the remaining horse and started toward Little Sergeyevka. It did not take me long to discover that riding bareback was not a pleasant experience. My horse was extremely skinny and his spine cut into my rear end. He stepped slowly and when I made him trot it felt as if I were being sawed in half. Consequently, I had to return him to his slow pace. Every few minutes I changed my position moving either closer to my mount's neck or closer to his rump. Although this latter location was undoubtedly the most comfortable, it was also most dangerous because the horse showed definite tendencies to throw me off of his back. Thus I was forced to give up any attempts at making myself more comfortable.

Halfway to Little Sergeyevka I met Mitka, a boy who hauled mail from our post office to the district post office. I guessed that it must have been 10 o'clock by now. I asked the boy if he had encountered a horse on his way. Yes, Mitka had seen the animal from a distance nibbling grass near a hedge. I went in that direction but did not find the horse. Finally I arrived at the stable 3 km (about 2 miles) from our village from where that horse had been borrowed, but the stable boy said the horse had not returned. He allayed my worries, however, by saying that the horse would return to his stable. There was no other solution but to return to Koshki. Halfway back I decided to dismount the horse and cover the remaining distance on foot leading my horse by his bridle. Not far from the Pogruznaya train station the chairman of our collective farm caught up with me. He was going to Koshki and suggested that I tie my horse to his *tarantas* and get in. Needless to say he did not have to repeat his invitation twice and in this manner I returned to Koshki.

My travel companion did not even attempt to hide her displeasure about my not having found the damn horse. "He will return to his stable." She said. "But how will we return home? After all it is a disgrace to ride in a two-horse wagon pulled by a single horse. And besides, how will you hitch that horse?" I was mad and tired, so I told her she could return on foot, and I would manage by myself because she was no help to me anyway. Of course, she was not going to walk to Sergeyevka and decided we would ride at night so that nobody would see us. In the meantime I got busy adapting the wagon so that it could be drawn by one horse. It was actually no problem and I remembered how peasants in Poland used to do it. That evening we started on our return trip with my companion sitting in the wagon and me walking beside it. The horse surprised by the absence of his mean companion and obviously lonely stepped slowly. Shortly before dawn we returned to Sergeyevka.

Needless to say my aunt and Steve were disappointed that I did not bring back any vodka and despite the late hour brought me up-to-date on recent events. It turned out that "dumb Vanya," who had attempted to kill Grusha with an axe, had again returned from the front, went straight to Grusha and insisted on marrying her. He had shown up the same day that I had left for the vodka. Grusha was petrified and afraid to step outside of her cabin. When she did go to the village mayor's office to ask that Vanya be sent away, Steve had to go with her. Because Vanya did not disappear from Sergeyevka, Steve accompanied Grusha whenever she went out into the village. "Better watch yourself." I said to him. "Because Vanya will kill you thinking that you are Grusha's lover." "Don't worry." Steve answered. "Vanya is wearing an empty holster. Grusha's boys looked inside when he was asleep and there was no revolver."

The next day in the afternoon Vanya arrived with another lieutenant. They went into Grusha's room, talked for a while, then the lieutenant came to our room and started talking with us about politics, about the Polish Army and Wanda Wasilewska, etc. Finally he remarked: "Thanks to Wanda Wasilewska you will soon return to your Warsaw but it won't be the old "bourgeois Warsaw." It will be a "Red Warsaw!" Steve and I could barely control ourselves in order not to respond to that lieutenant's idiotic talk. However, to his last remark we replied in unison: "We will see!" Two years later it turned out the lieutenant was correct with his remark about the future of Warsaw. That evening Grusha told us that the lieutenant was the head of one of the departments in the District Military Commissariat. Somehow Vanya had stolen Grusha's alarm clock and the next day disappeared from Sergeyevka forever with his friend, the lieutenant.

A few days we had ample proof that Vanya not only suspected Steve but also me of having an intimate relationship with Grusha. The District Military Commissariat ordered Steve and me to appear before the Military Commission. Each of us took one change of underwear (regulations required two changes), some food (regulations required provisions for six days), a wooden spoon and set out on foot for Koshki. In the building housing the Commissariat we met a few Poles from the neighboring villages and among them pan Rafal.

We were called individually into a room occupied by the Military Commission consisting of a *politruk* (political officer) holding the rank of a captain, a woman-physician and two officers. We were told to lift our shirts and the physician listened to our hearts and lungs with a wooden stethoscope. The usual verdict was *Godyen!* (will do). Steve passed the "physical examination." Then I was called in. "Any complaints?" The *politruk*

asked. "I am healthy." I answered and he said: "Show me your eye glasses." I handed them to the physician who looked through them and in turn gave them to the *politruk*. He examined them with the look of an expert. "How many diopters? The physician asked. "Eight." I answered. The *politruk* looked into his book. "Rejected." He said and gave me a dirty look. I went out into the hallway. The men who had been accepted to serve envied me, but I would gladly have changed places with any one of them. Steve was very happy that he had been accepted. We understood each other perfectly. Nothing had to be said. He would finally rid himself of the shadow of NKVD; even the front was better than living constantly with that nightmare. From that day on he would not have to worry about earned "workdays" and whether or not the collective farm would have enough to pay its workers. Now "The Soviet Fatherland" would dress him, feed him and send him to his death. While I remained with my old troubles and with the shadow of the NKVD looming over me. I phoned the post office in Sergeyevka and asked Nadia, the postmistress, to notify my aunt that I would return home the next day.

Life was going on, one day similar to the next, the drab sameness of vegetating in the Soviet Union. My aunt was crying her eyes out because there was no news from my uncle. Her friend, a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of Polish Patriots, had not answered any of her many letters. We rarely received letters from our friends. I continued to work for the collective farm. It was June (1944), and I was paired with Waclaw at haystacking. He decided to go to work because in February pani Maria gave birth to a baby girl. She used to cook for us when we were in the Home for Polish Invalids and afterwards moved in with Waclaw. They named the baby Wanda "in honor of Wanda Wasilewska" Waclaw used to say with that characteristic smirk on his thin withered face. Waclaw and pani Maria were the only family to whom we felt close. They were also the only Poles friendly toward us, and who had never uttered any bad words about us. We tried to help them as much as we could. Unfortunately we could not help them with food, because we had very little of it ourselves, but they were literally starving. However, we always found some items of my cousin Kathy's outgrown clothing for little Wanda. The infant had no clothes at all and when she was born there wasn't a piece of any material even for one diaper. "She is sleeping on straw like Baby Jesus." Pani Maria used to say with a sad smile on her worn out face.

Pani Maria was both a strange and an admirable woman. She never cried or complained about the fate which had been so cruel to her. After all she had lost track of her husband and five children, she had been sick and on the death's step and she had lost an eye because of her sickness. When she had thought she could never become pregnant after all those hardships and went to live with Waclaw because it was "lonely and difficult to be by herself," little Wanda was born. Every day pani Maria used to come to our cabin bringing the naked baby wrapped just in a blanket which was Waclaw's and Maria's most valuable possession. It served as a cover during the night, as a cape or an outer wrap and God only knows what else. Their clothes were literally in shreds and we were convinced that Waclaw's pants were held together by sheer miracle. Pani Maria used to come and help my aunt with anything just to be able to reciprocate our efforts at helping them.

The Russians and the Chuvashes showed more compassion toward Waclaw and pani Maria than toward any of their compatriots. The Poles found a thousand and one excuses to hate them. "They live together without being married; in sin." "They needed a brat like a hole in the head." "She was stealing in the Home and gorging herself on the invalids' food. It serves them right!" "That Waclaw is a born idler." etc. Waclaw and pani Maria lived with a Chuvash family which actually was supporting them. The family consisted of parents, an old couple, a 16-year old girl and 17-year old boy. The old man, Timofey, who was almost totally blind from chronic trachoma, worked as the night watchman in the cow shed. The daughter, Nina, was a stable girl and her brother, Sergey, worked with horses. Waclaw was my partner, both of us working for the collective farm, and I had to admit that he was lazy. I thought that it might have been due to undernourishment or because his leg still hurt him. The school principal's mother was sick, so the principal hired pani Maria to take care of their cow for which she was given meals and a half liter (about a pint) of milk for the baby.

One day when I came home from the field for dinner, my aunt showed me a letter from the prosecutor ordering her to report immediately to his office in the court building in Koshki. She was upset and I calmed her down explaining that it must have been some answer to her numerous letters and inquiries. We decided to leave as soon as possible. I went to the stable in order to find out if anyone was driving to Koshki so that she would at least get a ride, because walking the 15 km (10 miles) would be

quite an effort for her. Unfortunately nobody was even going in that direction. Consequently, I notified the foreman that I would not return to work that afternoon, because I had been called by the district prosecutor. Uncle Misha was not surprised at all; just like me, he expected me to be arrested any day. He, as well as the other collective farmers who had gotten to know my uncle, always inquired if we had had any word from him.

Without wasting any time my aunt and I started for Koshki. We took a half loaf of bread with us in anticipation of staying overnight at the "Home of the Collective Farmer." The day was sunny; a slight breeze was blowing so it was not too tiring to walk. After four hours we arrived in Koshki and immediately went to the courthouse. The prosecutor had already left his office and his secretary did not want to give us any information without her boss' permission. My aunt explained to her that she had only received the request to present herself at the prosecutor's office at noontime and could not arrive any sooner because she had made the trip on foot. The secretary phoned the prosecutor at his home, and he gave her instructions about taking care of my aunt's business. She took a letter from the Prosecutor of the Kuibyshev Province out of one of the drawers and read it to my aunt. The letter stated: "The Prosecutor of the Kuibyshev Province notifies Citizen (my aunt's name) that her husband (my uncle's name) is under investigation and imprisoned." My aunt had to sign verifying that the letter had been read to her. That was the only reason for her being asked to present herself at the district prosecutor's office. From the courthouse we went straight to Aunt Tosya who was very happy to see the two of us. She asked about my uncle and in turn told us all the possible (and impossible!) gossip. We stayed overnight at the "Home of the Collective Farmer" and returned the next day to Sergeyevka.

The life on the collective farm continued at its usual pace: getting up at 5 o'clock in the morning, working until noon, dinner break until 3 p.m. then working until 8:30 in the evening. It was already the second week in July and the starting time of the harvest. I worked on a reaper with Uncle Grisha. In the beginning it was difficult for me to get used to the work. Uncle Grisha manned the three horses and I sat on a little seat attached to the platform. My job was to remove the mowed rye from the blade with a small two-pronged pitchfork. When an amount sufficient for a sheaf collected on the platform I pushed it off to the rear and on the ground. Although this work was quite simple, it required a certain amount of precision because the difference of a few centimeters in the pitchfork's position caused its prongs to get into the knife blade and frequently break it. On the other hand, if not all of the cut rye was removed from the knife blade, it eventually plugged up the teeth of the reaper in which the blade was oscillating. In this case the rye remained uncut and pushed to the ground, or some of it ripped out of the ground rather than being cut, etc.

The July heat was in full swing, the tall and heavy rye became entangled in the rotating vanes of the reaper whipping my face. Uncle Grisha egged on the horses which were almost galloping. He claimed that the reaper's teeth were getting plugged up because the machine did not move fast enough and the rye was thick. In the meantime I had an awful time sitting on the platform. The little seat was extremely uncomfortable and the platform jumped up and down on the bumpy field. We rotated our jobs after each turn. When Uncle Grisha sat on the platform, and I manned the horses, I also egged them on in order to get even with the old man but he shouted not to drive them too hard, because they would tire out. Well, I suffered until I finally got mad and told the foreman I would not work anymore on the same reaper with Uncle Grisha. The foreman laughed, but put me on another reaper. Now Uncle Grisha worked with a Chuvash boy. They constantly argued in their language because the boy also objected to Uncle Grisha's work habits.

At about that time the chairperson of the Kuibyshev Provincial Committee of the Union of Polish Patriots, pani Ala, arrived in the district and visited villages in which there were Poles. She also came to Sergeyevka and held conferences with Messrs. Kozhukh and Ellengold as well as with the director of Indom. Of course, those individuals did not miss the opportunity to acquaint pani Ala with the "black reactionaries" in their midst as represented by our family, Wacław and pani Maria and a few invalids. A meeting of the Polish population was called in the club building and pani Ala spoke in glowing terms about the Polish Army equipped by the Soviets which was fighting the Germans shoulder to shoulder with the Red Army. In her talk she was careful not to attack either the "local black reactionaries" nor the Polish Government in London. The meeting ended with a collection of cash taken up for the supplementary equipping of the Polish Army and 500 rubles was collected for that purpose. That same day pani Ala

discussed with Kozhukh and Ellengold the establishment of a UPP chapter in our district and, after spending the night in the Indom director's cabin, went to Petrovka the next morning leaving the establishment of a UPP district chapter up in the air. The reason for it was obvious: a vast majority of the Poles sided with the London Government and suspected quite rightly that the UPP was a bunch of communists and their sympathizers, who were totally unsuited for leadership because like Kozhukh and Ellengold they could not speak either Polish or Russian even half decently.

In the fields the harvest was in full swing. My partner was Andrey, a tall Chuvash about 50-years old with a very large number of children whose age ranged from two to thirty years. Consequently one of his grandsons was the same age as one of the child's uncles. One day around the middle of July (1944) I was working in the field about 2 km (1¼ mile) from the village, when my aunt came running. When I noticed her in the distance, I knew immediately something very important had happened. It turned out that she had received a cable from some Polish woman living in the same village where Stephen used to live and whose husband had also been arrested. The cable stated that the trial of my uncle and others would take place in two days in Kuibyshev and after the trial it would be possible to visit the condemned. That same morning pani Mila, who used to be the baker in the Home for Polish Invalids and now worked as a cleaning woman in the Indom, received an order from the NKVD to present herself at the trial as a witness. It was quite obvious that during the investigation pani Mila had testified against my uncle and now she was to confirm her depositions publicly. She claimed, however, that she had testified in his favor and even offered to take some food for him. We gave her a pound of butter in a Lipton tea can and 50 *rubles* cash. We did not have more of anything and beside we could not send more cash because someone had to go to Kuibyshev. My aunt insisted that I go but I pointed out to her that as the wife she had an obligation to go and see her husband. So it was finally decided that she would go. That same afternoon I took time off from work, packed a half a loaf of bread and some personal things in a small sack for my aunt to take, and we went on foot to Koshki.

Upon our arrival in town we went straight to the apartment of one of the Polish families where my aunt was to spend the night. The family consisted of a father, a mother and two teenagers. The daughter had another year of high school and the boy was thirteen. Both parents, rather plain people but very warm and pleasant, were tailors from Lublin and worked in the Koshki Tailoring Cooperative. They immediately took care of my aunt and went out to find a truck that would take her to Kuibyshev. Quite by chance we also met Saul Sznycer in Koshki. He gave my aunt the address of his youngest brother, Izaak, who lived in Kuibyshev. Izaak, who had a bad heart, had left Petrovka back in the fall 1943 for medical treatment. In the city he had met a girl and they had just been married. My aunt also had the address of the UPP office in Kuibyshev. After resting for two hours I started on my way back to Sergeyevka. I was lucky, because beyond the railroad crossing I met up with wagons returning to our village after their delivery of the grain to the elevator and I hitched a ride with them.

The next day my aunt sent word with the boy bringing the mail from the district to Sergeyevka that she expected to leave by truck for Kuibyshev that afternoon. There was no news from her for four days. During that time Grusha cooked for us and showed us a lot of compassion. She was not the only one, because all of the Chuvashes, the miller's family as well as the family of our village mayor, Anna Pavlovna, sympathised with us and always asked about my uncle. On the fourth day pani Mila returned from the trial. She did not give any details and only said that she had given my uncle the butter and the cash. It turned out in due course that my uncle had not received anything, and then Kathy saw the Lipton tea can in which we had sent the butter in pani Mila's room.

My aunt returned from Kuibyshev on the fifth day brokenhearted. Her trip had turned out to be a total fiasco. The truck that took her to Kuibyshev broke down and she missed the trial. She immediately went to the provincial NKVD offices in order to find out about my uncle's fate. The investigator, whose name she had received from the woman who had notified her about the trial, refused to see her but she managed to explain to him over the phone the purpose of her call. However, the investigator shouted into the phone: "I know nothing about your husband! He is not in Kuibyshev and you will never see him again!" And he hung up. My aunt all in tears went to pani Ala, the provincial representative of UPP, but instead of receiving some consolation and understanding from the representative of a "Polish" organization, she had to listen to a tirade that "the Russians know what they are doing and if they sentenced your husband they had reasons for doing so because he must have been an enemy of the people. The UPP was not

interested in such individuals since the enemies of its friends were also the UPP's enemies." She spent two days at Izaak Szyner's and his in-law's home. They attempted to console her as much as they could, and Izaak tried to distract her with stories about his wedding, gifts, etc., but all the stories seemed to go in one ear and come out the other.

Finally my aunt started on her return trip. After waiting several hours by the side of a highway leading out of Kuibyshev for a truck going toward Koshki she was picked up by a car which took her to a point about halfway between Kuibyshev and Koshki. She got off and again waited by the side of the highway for a truck which hopefully would take her to Koshki or for a wagon which would take her at least to nearby Yelkhovka where she could stop for the night. The trucks from Yelkhovka were regularly hauling grain to the Pogruznaya elevator. My aunt sat down in a ditch bordering the highway, rolled a cigarette and lit it. Some Gypsies camped in a nearby field and a Gypsy-woman returning from Yelkhovka to the camp stopped in front of my aunt saying: "Give me a smoke." My aunt handed her a little satchel with *makhorka* (home grown tobacco) and a piece of newspaper. The Gypsy rolled a cigarette, lit it and said to my aunt: "Show me your hand. I will read your palm." My aunt extended her right hand with the palm up. The Gypsy looked at it and said: "You have a lot of grief. Your husband has not been with you for some time and you went to see him but you did not get to see him. Don't worry because your husband is alive and when you return home you will get a letter from him." The Gypsy left, a passing truck picked up my aunt and brought her straight home, because it was going through our village on the way to Salavan for firewood. The next day a letter arrived from my uncle, the first news in eight months. He was in Kuibyshev after all. The investigator purposely misled my aunt as to his whereabouts. His address was "Distribution Camp No. 8" and he implored us to bring him fat, sugar, bread and cash which was to be deposited in the camp office into my uncle's account. He urged us to hurry because he could be shipped out. We knew well that "shipped out" meant ending up in the Far East, Siberia, Arkhangel Province, Komi Republic, or somewhere in the vast areas of the Asiatic Soviet Union which were full of prison camps.

I decided to travel to Kuibyshev the next Sunday. My aunt borrowed enough money to buy 5 pounds of butter at 40 *rubles*/pound, 3 pounds of sugar at 50 *rubles*/pound, and to deposit 500 *rubles* into my uncle's account in the camp's office and 1000 *rubles* for my trip because the truck drivers were charging 350 *rubles* one-way. In the meantime I got busy securing the proper travel documents for myself. After all I did not have a Soviet passport or any other identification document. At this time both Sergey Stepanovich, chairman of the collective farm, as well as our village mayor, Anna Pavlovna, turned out to be very helpful. I received one document from the collective's administration certifying that I was traveling to Kuibyshev on the collective farm's business, and a second certificate from the mayor's office stating that I lived in Sergeyevka. Now I would not be in danger of being stopped by the militia for traveling with no documents and coming to the city on business. In the worst scenario I could be stopped by a military patrol, arrested as a deserter, because I had no military documents and dragged before a military commission. In this case there was a 99% chance that the commission would let me go as unsuitable for military service and only a 1% chance that I would be shipped off to the Polish Army. Actually I would have welcomed this latter possibility because I was sick and tired of the constant struggle to survive and the constant fear of the NKVD.

Assignment: Kuibyshev

On Saturday, August 5, 1944, at noon, I set out for Koshki carrying a sack on my back with fifteen pounds of provisions, a few sets of underwear and a pair of trousers for my uncle. After a three-hour walk I arrived in Koshki, stopped at the "Home of the Collective Farmer" and reserved a place for the night. This time I was lucky and managed to get into the "better quarters" which consisted of the two- and three-person rooms. Each bed had something resembling a sheet and a thin blanket. Next I went to the family from Lublin, the Zweigs. They were very happy to see me, felt sorry for my aunt and me and immediately "mobilized" the other three Poles living in Koshki to find a truck which could take me to Kuibyshev. I rested at the Zweigs' and returned to the "Home of the Collective Farmer" because sometimes trucks bringing profiteers from the city used to stop there. These people brought goods manufactured in Kuibyshev such as cans, pots, soap, paints, etc. and either sold them or bartered for dairy products and meat which in turn they sold in the Kuibyshev markets at a 400% markup.

I went out of the building and down the steps which lead to the backyard. A truck loaded with potatoes was parked under a small roof in one corner. Two farm women were sitting on top of the pile of potatoes. I rolled a cigarette, stuck it in my mouth but did not light it. Because the yard was strewn with straw and other garbage, smoking a cigarette would have invited disaster. I moved toward the truck in order to negotiate with the driver the possibility of his taking me to Kuibyshev, when an NKVD lieutenant stepped out from behind the truck and started walking toward me. Startled I decided to turn toward the outhouse located near the truck. "Well," I said to myself. "That truck is out. It is like getting into a lion's den."

In the meantime the officer came close, and I just looked spellbound at his blue cap with the red band, his gold shoulder straps with the two gold stars, his belts, his map case and his big revolver. "You probably want to light the cigarette. Here are the matches," the officer said in perfect Polish. I could not utter a single word and felt my legs getting weak. I just shook my head affirmatively as the officer handed me a box with matches. All kinds of thoughts came rushing through my mind including the worst one which was that the officer would ask me my reason for going to Kuibyshev, inspect my documents, notice my last name and arrest me on the spot. "You are Polish, aren't you?" The officer asked. "Yes," I said. "That's great! I will introduce you to your compatriot. Grisha!" The officer shouted toward the truck. A 220-lb NKVD NCO stepped out from behind the truck and approached the two of us. "Grisha, meet your compatriot." The lieutenant said to the noncom. We shook hands, and I mumbled my last name. I felt queasy. The officer suggested that we go to the market place and look at the weekly bazaar. I walked in the middle, an NKVD man on each side of me, and worried that someone from our village might spot me in their company and tell my aunt that I had been arrested.

We walked around the market place a bit and returned to the inn where we sat down on a bench in front of it. All the time we spoke Polish. Grisha addressed the lieutenant as *Panie poruczniku*, which is Polish for "Lieutenant, sir." The whole situation as well as both NKVD men seemed very puzzling to me. In the course of our conversation we began to learn something about each other. I talked a little bit but guardedly just mentioning that I worked on a nearby collective farm, supported my aunt and a little cousin, that the collective had been very good to us, etc. Grisha said that he had been the manager of a city garage in Rowno, was drafted into the Red Army and presently served in the NKVD with Lieutenant X. The lieutenant had a strictly Polish last name, and initially I thought he was a Pole. He turned out, however, to be a Jew from Odessa and a tailor by trade ("An Odessa *zhulik* (trickster)" I said to myself.) I asked the lieutenant how he had learned to speak Polish so well. "From Grisha." He answered. "We have been working together since May Day." I complemented him saying that he had a real knack for foreign languages if he had mastered Polish just in two months and spoke with almost no accent.

"Do you know pani Ala, the provincial representative of the UPP in Kuibyshev? She had visited your district recently, didn't she?" I said: "Yes." and thought: "It's a fine time when officers of NKVD are buddies with the higher-ups of the Union of Polish Patriots. Both NKVD men also knew the Zweigs so we went to their place for a chat. We wanted to go to the only movie house in Koshki, but it was closed for repairs. In the evening I said goodbye to my new acquaintances. The lieutenant gave me his address in Kuibyshev, Wodnikov Street No. 16, and asked me to visit him. "My wife is from Poland," He said. "And will be so happy to meet you. And we have a beautiful little son, Leszek." I took the address just to be

polite, but at that same moment decided not to make use of it. If I were fortunate to get to Kuibyshev, why should I walk into a lion's den? Grisha and the lieutenant were very sorry they could not offer me a ride but their truck was overloaded with potatoes. I did not mind it at all suspecting a trap and even could not sleep at night not only because of bedbugs which bit mercilessly, but also because I expected to be arrested any moment.

The next morning I breathed easier when I noticed that my acquaintances had left. Immediately I got busy looking for some means of transportation to Kuibyshev. In the afternoon I chanced on an old bus whose driver agreed to take me for 350 *rubles*. Around 1:00 p.m. all of the passengers gathered around the bus and started boarding it. The driver and his assistant, a woman in a one-piece driver's work suit, loaded the bus with sacks of potatoes, cans with clarified butter and with the human "cargo" which occupied the wooden benches along each side of the of bus' interior.

Finally my turn came to board the bus. I climbed inside and sat down real close to some man. Immediately behind me the driver shoved inside two sacks with potatoes and threw my knapsack on my lap. A woman sat down next to me and pushed me even more against my neighbor. Since the bus interior was low and I was tall, I had my knees against a sack with potatoes, my knapsack and a sack of potatoes on my knees, and I was touching the ceiling of the bus with my head. Finally the loading of the bus was over. The driver gave each passenger a 45-*ruble* ticket equivalent to the one-way fare to Kuibyshev. "If a militiaman asks how much you paid for the trip, say '45 *rubles*' and show him the ticket as the proof." After having said it, he locked the rear door with a key so neither the passengers nor the load of food could fly out of the bus on the way. For five minutes the driver attempted to start the engine by turning the crank as if it were a pencil sharpener. Finally he succeeded and off we went!

It was terribly hot inside the bus, because several windows were boarded up with plywood and the remaining ones did not open. The passengers were sweating profusely, and as soon as we reached the highway I started bumping my head against the ceiling of the bus. In order to avoid it I had to lower my head and in a few minutes I ended up with a stiff neck. Changing the tilt of my head from time to time did not do much good. I breathed easier when the bus stopped at the "Engels Collective Farm," and our driver opened the door to let in some fresh air. I could not get out to stretch out my neck and legs because the stopover was very short. To my horror, I discovered that we had gone only 20 km (10¼ miles) and another 120 km (75 miles) remained to Kuibyshev.

Shortly we were on our way again. The sun beat down mercilessly. It was hot, stuffy and dusty inside the bus. The next stop was in Novyi Buyan about 60 km (38 miles) from Kuibyshev. Our driver opened the door and let us get out into fresh air. Novyi Buyan was a large town and the center of the district by the same name. We stretched out on the grass near the highway while the driver, his assistant and a few of his friends from among the passengers went to dine in a nearby cabin. Obviously its inhabitants were engaged in some business ventures with our driver. After nearly two hours the driver (tipsy by now!) came out and announced that we would drive straight through to Kuibyshev, so we boarded the bus. Through the filthy window across from my seat I could see the suburban traffic. Wagons and trucks were going to and from the city. The highway was still full of potholes, and I eagerly waited for the bus to reach Semeykino and the beginning of an asphalt roadway. I knew that a militia check point was at Semeykino. On the one hand I worried about it, but on the other hand I knew that I would feel safer with Semeykino behind me.

When the bus came up to the check point, a militiaman examined our driver's documents, ordered him to open the bus door, barely looked at the exhausted passengers, felt the sacks and told the driver to move on. Again the driver locked the door and we were on our way. Although now we were on an asphalt roadway the bus seemed to bump up and down even worse than before. A few kilometers (miles) before the city proper the driver stopped the bus and collected the fare together with the tickets he had given us in Koshki. Finally we arrived in Kuibyshev.

The first stop was at the Gypsy Bazaar (*Tsyganka*) where some of the passengers got off. Since the driver lived close to the address which my aunt had given me, Izaak Sznycer's place, I was the last passenger to get off the bus. Izaak lived two blocks away from another bazaar located in the center of the city which was called *Ilyinka*.

Kuibyshev

I got off the bus, heaved the knapsack on my back and started in the direction pointed out to me by the driver. I felt strange. In the first place I was afraid that any moment I would be approached by a militiaman and arrested. Secondly it was the first time in five years since leaving Warsaw that I was in a city. I stared at streetcars as if I were seeing them for the first time in my life. Actually there was nothing to stare at because they were old rattling cars with paint peeling off, moving on railroad tracks sticking out of the roadway. The streets were paved with field stones and in some places covered with asphalt. The sidewalks were broken and full of holes.

It was about 8:00 o'clock in the evening when I reached Izaak Sznycer's apartment and rang the doorbell. A woman opened the door and almost immediately Izaak stepped into the hallway. He was very happy to see me, took my knapsack and introduced me to his wife and to the other people living in the apartment. Since they were having supper I was asked to join them at the table, and we started talking. I felt as if I were dreaming. The apartment consisted of four rooms, a kitchen and a long hallway. The rooms were elegantly furnished by Soviet standards. In the dining room I noticed a bed, a sofa and a sewing machine in addition to the usual dining room furniture, all signs of a "truly prosperous" household.

A six-tube radio stood on a small table in the corner, and Izaak told me with pride in his voice that every evening when there were no strangers around, he listened to the world news from London broadcast in Polish. In the room occupied by Izaak and his wife there was a piano in addition to their bed, a wardrobe with a mirror, a trunk and a small table with all kinds of knickknacks. Izaak's in-laws, a pleasant older couple, as well as their daughter-in-law with a one-year old boy and Izaak mother-in-law's niece with her husband and a seven-year old boy also lived in the apartment. Galina, Izaak's wife, was a 20-year old girl who was not pretty but had a lot of warmth and charm. She had graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory, was evacuated to Tashkent and must have been quite talented, because she had given piano recitals. Galina's father, Lev Yakovlevich, a short grey-haired man, was the manager of a department in a workmen's cooperative producing items of *shirpotreb* (*shirokovo upotrebovaniya*), things for everyday needs. He must have been also doing some business on the side because his salary would not have permitted him to run such a luxurious household. The table settings and the food served made me forget at least for a while that I was actually in the Soviet Union. I participated in a typical prewar supper which I had not seen or eaten for the past five years.

Galina Sznycer and her sister-in-law, also named Galina, were the same age but one could not help noticing that the wife of Galina Sznycer's brother, Yasha, must have gone through a lot in her short life. As I already mentioned one of the rooms was occupied by Galina Sznycer's cousin, her husband and son. She had some incurable eye condition, and no eye glasses could correct her failing eyesight. Her husband, a dental technician, worked in a polyclinic and moonlighted when patients from the polyclinic paid him separately to have their work done faster.

After supper Izaak suggested that we go out for a walk so that he could show me the city. Not far from their apartment was a huge square with a big modern building housing the opera. It was illuminated by bright searchlights which seemed strange to me since Kuibyshev and its environs were a large industrial center and thus presented a target for German air raids. Along the building at the height of its second floor hung a slogan in white lettering on a red background "Long live the All-Union Communist Party of the Bolsheviks - the Party of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin." In front of the opera house, in the middle of the square, stood an overpowering statue of Stalin also illuminated by a searchlight. The square itself as well as the side streets were rather dark and Izaak warned me about the dangers of walking in the city after dark because gangs of robbers pulled people into alleys or squares and undressed them completely stealing their clothing. I urged him to return to the apartment, because I was afraid of being arrested but Galina thought I was unnecessarily worried about it.

She talked about her family and about her sister-in-law. Yasha, Galina's brother, was at the front from the very beginning of the war, and there had been no news from him for a year. In his last letter, sent from the Caucasus, Yasha wrote that he was leaving by plane for the front with the general on whose staff he was. Galina's mother cried her eyes out because of Yasha's disappearance and transferred all her love to his son. At the same time she treated the daughter-in-law like a piece of dirt, although the

latter kept to herself and out of everybody's way as much as possible. One day while talking with me, Yasha's wife said: "I realize that my husband's family tolerates me only because of the child. They did not want Yasha to marry me. I was poor, my parents died a long time ago, and I was brought up by my grandmother who also died. My being poor was bad enough but there was also the stigma of my ethnic background. You see, I am Polish by birth. However, Yasha and I were in love. You know how it is. About two years ago Yasha came on furlough, we got married, and he left for the front. I gave birth to a son and now I am a widow, a piece of furniture in my in-laws' home who tolerate me only because of my son." When we returned from the walk I went to sleep immediately because the next morning I wanted to start out early to search for the prison camp in which my uncle was incarcerated.

The next day I got up early and had breakfast. I wanted to skip it, but both Izaak and Galina said they would feel insulted. After breakfast I asked Izaak how to get to the building housing the provincial NKVD offices where I hoped to find out the address of the prison camp. Downtown Kuibyshev was not very large, therefore, the building was not far from the Sznycers' apartment, and I decided to walk. At any rate, there seemed to be no means of public transportation. I went along Red Army Street to Stepan Razin Street at the end of which was the NKVD building.

On one corner I stopped in front of a bulletin board on which there were posted the communiques from the Soviet Information Bureau. The news from the front was full of names of the localities near Warsaw: Siedlce, Otwock, Falenica, Wawer. Fighting was going on even for "Fortress Praga." For me Praga was a Warsaw district, on the eastern bank of the Vistula River, poor and dirty, with shabby houses and apartment buildings which would all collapse from one well-placed artillery shell. But in the "News from the Front" of the Soviet Information Bureau Praga was a "fortress." In addition to the news about the front the bulletins also carried information about the uprising in Warsaw against the Germans. I stood there not feeling the weight of the knapsack on my back, as if I were in a trance reading and re-reading the dispatches from Warsaw. The names of Generals Bor and Monter, the commanders of the uprising, meant nothing to me, but the Warsaw districts mentioned in those dispatches stood clearly before my eyes: Old Town, Zoliborz, Mokotow. I tried to recall the buildings and shops. I came to the end of the information bulletin and snapped out of the trance. Here I was at the corner of Red Army and Samarska Streets. The wind carried clouds of dust and trash past me. Every once in a while carts or wagons drawn by donkeys or horses and trucks passed by. Horse-drawn *droshky* served as taxis, and there were no cars.

I shifted the weight of my knapsack, walked down the street and turned into Stepan Razin Street. The street was wide and dirty, with low dilapidated houses none higher than three stories, and with broken pavement, bumpy and full of potholes. I walked for a few blocks and found myself in front of a seven-story gloomy building occupying a whole city bloc, the headquarters of the provincial NKVD. Black shiny limousines were parked in front of the building, their drivers busy polishing them. Officers in NKVD uniforms with gold shoulder straps and blue caps with red bands entered or left the building. I selected an entrance which seemed to be less used than some of the others, crossed the street and, feeling uneasy and ready for the worst, went inside. I found myself in a large hall where a NCO on duty was pacing back and forth near a desk. Noticing me he moved immediately in my direction. I probably looked suspicious to him, and my clothes betrayed my being a Pole. I asked the NCO about the address of the prison camp whose number my uncle had sent to us. Fortunately, he provided the information without asking the purpose of my visit. I am sure it was not difficult for him to guess it anyway. It turned out that the prison camp was relatively close. I hurriedly left the NKVD building without looking behind from fear that someone could be chasing me and went in the direction pointed out to me by the NCO. On my way I had to walk down Wodnikow Street. In front of the entrance to No. 16 where Lieutenant X., whom I had met in Koshki, lived, an NKVD trooper with a rifle was pacing back and forth. This further convinced me that it would be unwise to pay Lieutenant X. a visit.

Wodnikow Street led down a steep slope toward the Volga River which could be seen between the houses. On the river bank there were wooden barracks surrounded by barbed wire with watchtowers placed in every corner. This was the prison camp which was the object of my search. A wide wooden gate crisscrossed with barbed wire was next to a small building undoubtedly housing the guardhouse, the commandant's office, etc. The gate was closed, and there was no one to ask for information about my uncle. The guard sought relief from the hot sun by staying inside the guardhouse whose windows were

boarded up. I tried to find some entrance but the guard posted on the nearest watchtower shouted menacingly in my direction: "Hey, you! What are you doing there? Move away immediately!" His shouting brought out the guard on duty from inside the guardhouse who asked me what I wanted.

I explained to him the purpose of my visit but he said: "Today we do not accept parcels, only on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-5 p.m." I asked the guard to be so kind and check whether or not my uncle's name was on the roster of prisoners. Otherwise there was no point of my coming back the next day, and I would search for him in another prison camp. The guard went inside and returned after a while saying: "Come tomorrow. That prisoner is in our camp."

I took the same route to return to the Szynycers'. There was a new war communique pasted on the bulletin board on the street corner. A short blurb caught my eye: "Prime minister Mikołajczyk arrived in Moscow with a Polish delegation from London." I could feel the perspiration trickling down my back. Maybe the talks in Moscow would lead to some understanding between the "London Poles" and the "Lublin Poles" so that my uncle and the others like him would be released. For the past two weeks the Polish Committee of National Liberation, organized and supported by the Soviets, had established itself in Lublin. The names of its members were not known to the Polish masses. The Committee member in charge of agriculture was Andrzej Witos, who used to represent the Polish Embassy somewhere in the northern part of the Soviet Union. Later he became a member of the Executive Committee of the Union of Polish Patriots and finally landed a position on the Polish Committee of National Liberation, otherwise known as the "Lublin Committee." He was related to Wincenty Witos, a well-known and respected leader of the Polish peasant movement, and prime minister of Poland in 1926. A few years after Marshal Pilsudski's *coup d'etat* in May of 1926 Wincenty Witos was imprisoned for a time in the Brzesc fortress during the rule of the "Sanacja Group" and finally went into exile in 1933. Thus the name of Andrzej Witos gave some semblance of legitimacy to the Lublin group.

Another member of the Lublin Committee was General Michał Rola-Zymierski. His position was most puzzling to those who were familiar with the period of Poland's independence (1918-1939) and with the history of Pilsudski's Polish Legions in 1914-1918. During World War I, Zymierski was an officer in Pilsudski's Legions. In 1920, just like other Polish officers, he participated in the Polish-Bolshevik War, and its offensives toward Kiev, Minsk and Borysow to stem the onslaught of the Communist Red Armies and to establish the eastern frontier of Poland. Until Marshal Pilsudski's *coup d'etat* in 1926, Gen. Zymierski was frequently a close associate of Gen. Sikorski who during that period of time held various high level positions in the Polish army and government. There was no doubt in anybody's mind that Gen. Zymierski was far from being a Communist but also far from being in favor with the "Sanacja Group."

Eventually, some time after the May 1926 *coup d'etat*, Gen. Sikorski left Poland and went to France. Gen. Zymierski remained in Poland on active duty and a few years later was court-martialed for financial improprieties in connection with the purchase of gas masks for the army. It was obvious that the trial was staged and had a political basis. Nevertheless this youngest Polish general (and supposedly one of Marshal Pilsudski's favorites) was sentenced to five years of confinement in some fortress. During the German occupation of Poland Gen. Zymierski supposedly commanded the Peasant Battalions, the fighting arm of the Polish Peasant Party. How it came to pass that Gen. Zymierski accepted the position of Commander-in-Chief in Communist Poland was beyond anyone's comprehension. When I returned to Poland after the war, I heard an opinion expressed that Zymierski was the shrewdest person in the whole political clique and, in an appropriate moment, would turn the army against the Communists.

The next day was Tuesday, one of the days when the prisoners in the camp where my uncle was incarcerated, could receive parcels. Although the window of the barrack where names of visitors were taken down would not open until 2:00 p.m., I decided to arrive at the prison camp by 10:00 a.m. in order to be among the first people in line. It turned out, however, that despite the early hour a considerable group of people with packages was already there. They were sitting on the ground leaning against the wall of a barracks and holding their bundles with food between their knees. I took a place at the end of the line. Those waiting were mostly peasants. A minority seemed to be from Kuibyshev and the nearby industrial settlements. People were engaged in chitchat to pass the time. One woman with her daughter looked different from the others and I gathered that her husband was imprisoned for embezzling several thousand rubles. According to her story someone else actually embezzled the money but her husband

was the bookkeeper and, consequently, was held responsible for the missing money.

People freely shared their troubles and talked about the prisoners' offenses using the numbers which represented the articles of the Soviet Criminal Code, rather than by describing the offenses. It was one of those curious things about Soviet Russia which made many foreigners think that each and every Soviet citizen knew the Soviet Criminal Code by heart. That was actually not so far from truth in a country where a citizen's every move (not necessarily wrong!) could lead to prison. If Ivan's wife said that her husband was sentenced under Article 58-10, then her neighbor knew that his offense was "inciting against the government." Every Soviet citizen knew that Article 58 dealt with "political activity," consisted of 14 subarticles, and drew a minimum sentence of an 8-year term at hard labor in a prison camp.

Shortly after 2:00 p.m. one of the windows of the barracks opened, and a soldier started taking down the names of those waiting, as well as the names of the prisoners who were to receive the parcels. The people, numbering about 200 by now, jumped up from their places and holding on to their bundles tightly started pushing toward the window. A row began and was punctuated by the shouts of the guard on the top of a nearby watchtower. Two troopers with rifles ran out of the barracks. Swearing as only the Russians can and using the butts of their rifles they managed to make the people stand in line. The sun beat down mercilessly. I thought I would get a sun stroke. Around 3:00 p.m. I finally found myself in front of the window. Behind it sat a soldier with an opened shirt and a pockmarked face, who wrote down the information on a sheet of dirty paper using a small piece of pencil. "To whom?" He asked. I gave my uncle's name, and the soldier wrote it down after licking the pencil. "Documents." The soldier mumbled. I handed him the certificates from the village mayor's and collective farm's offices. He examined them carefully and handed them over to another soldier who must have been sitting on the other side of the table because I only saw the hand that took the documents. "Your brother?" The soldier asked returning my papers. "Yes." I lied not being certain that a nephew would be a close enough relation to give my uncle a parcel. "OK," The soldier said. "Wait until we call the name." Again I sat down on the ground and waited.

Shortly before 5:00 p.m. the camp came to life as trucks loaded with prisoners began arriving from the direction of the city. The prisoners were tightly packed sitting on the floor of the truck with their legs pulled up, guarded by four soldiers, one in each corner of the platform their rifles on the ready and aimed at the prisoners. When transported by truck prisoners always sat on the floor because it would be easier for a standing prisoner to jump off a moving truck than for a sitting one and who was scrunched to boot. The guards faced one another so that one pair could always shoot behind the truck while the other covered the field in front of it. In either case the prisoners were always under the watchful eyes of two guards even if the other two were engaged in shooting.

After a while the window opened again and a soldier started calling out names. When I heard my name, I approached the window and handed my knapsack with the provisions to the soldier. In that brief moment I saw my uncle standing outside the opposite wall of the barracks in a group of prisoners who peeked in through the windows. I managed to notice that he had grown a mustache and that his head was shaved. "How are Ola and Kathy?" He shouted. "Well!" I managed to shout back before the window slammed shut. In a few minutes the soldier returned the empty knapsack. My uncle shouted to me to leave the money for him in the office. The office was closed for the day, and I had to return the next day. This time I was let inside the camp because the office window was in a side wall of the barracks in front of the one where I had spent the previous day. A clerk took the money from me without giving me a receipt for it, and marked my uncle's name on a piece of paper.

On my way back from the prison camp I decided to visit pani Ala, the chairperson of the Provincial Executive Committee of the Union of Polish Patriots. There was a movie theater at the address I had been given and after some difficulty I found an entrance leading to a staircase. Since pani Ala lived on the fourth floor and the lower floors were occupied by some offices, a female guard posted on every landing asked me where I was going and on what business. Finally I stood in front of door leading to pani Ala's "apartment." The yelling of two children could be heard from the inside. I knocked on the door and a woman's voice said in Russian to enter. I opened the door, walked straight into a screen, closed the door behind me, walked around the screen and found myself in a large room. Four beds stood under its walls, a table and a few chairs in its center. The room was a mess. A one-year old boy with curly hair sat on the

table and played with an elderly woman who turned out to be pani Ala's mother. In one corner a three-year old girl played with a rag doll. Pani Ala was out but was supposed to return shortly. Her mother asked me to sit down and wait. We engaged in small talk. Mrs. G. was familiar with the situation in our district, knew that my uncle had been arrested, etc. However, the ice between us was truly broken when it turned out that Mrs. G. had lived in Warsaw in the same apartment building as my parents and remembered my father's name very well.

Pani Ala returned in a half-hour. She greeted me very cordially, asked about my aunt, whether or not I had gotten to see my uncle, etc. We talked about our district and pani Ala asked me to convey her regards to Mr. Ellengold and Saul Sznycer in Petrovka. On a shelf I noticed a few jars with honey and clarified butter, at that time luxuries for city dwellers, and guessed that both gentlemen must have supplied those products, and that some political play was taking place behind the scenes. I told pani Ala about my adventure with the NKVD lieutenant and his driver in Koshki which amused her no end. It turned out that I got upset about meeting the two of them for nothing. The lieutenant was the chief supply officer for the Kuibyshev Fire Company No. 1. The fire department, among many other services, belonged to the NKVD, and its members were entitled to wear NKVD uniforms and insignia as well as revolvers.

Pani Ala mentioned that she might make a future visit to our district in order to establish a chapter of the UPP. Now it became clear to me why "the gentlemen from Petrovka" lavished priceless gifts like honey and clarified butter on pani Ala. They wanted to be appointed to the top positions in the UPP chapter and be responsible for the distribution of clothing, food supplies, etc. which would be shipped for the Polish population. I knew full well that neither Jacob nor Saul Sznycer would take any more that was due them, but those individuals just wanted the title and the prestige that went with it. I knew from my personal experience that dealing with the Polish population on matters related to food and clothing distribution was a most unpleasant activity, because one exposed himself to charges about taking more than his dole, to complaints, tears and even denunciations to the NKVD. I could understand Mr. Ellengold who did not avail himself of the support rendered by the Embassy, because he had accepted a Soviet passport back in 1940. However, I was surprised at Saul Sznycer who had already had experience in dealing with those people.

After saying goodbye to pani Ala I decided to take a walk through the city. Trolley buses, which I had never seen before, ran along the main street. I wanted to try out this means of transportation, but they were so packed with people that after waiting close to two hours at the stop and letting at least ten of them pass by I gave up and continued on foot. Long lines of people already stood in front of the stores selling bread, although it was not expected to be delivered before the evening. The majority of stores were closed, but in every store window stood a portrait of Stalin. Through the door of one of the open stores I noticed a few bolts of navy blue material on the shelf. Playing dumb I went inside and asked if I could buy four yards. "No, Comrade," The saleswoman answered. "You must have coupons and it is only for Party members who are also stakhanovites. The material is for men's trousers." One needed coupons even to buy matches which were also available. The only merchandise which I could purchase was tooth powder manufactured by "Tezhe Cosmetic Factory" in Moscow and some borated vaseline in plastic tubes. I bought two tubes of borated vaseline and twenty envelopes of tooth powder. It would always come in handy and, besides, I wanted to bring gifts for my aunt and my cousin.

I went to the Main Post Office in order to send a cable to my aunt in the U.S.A. International cables were accepted on the second floor. A guard in civilian clothes with a red arm band and leaning on a rifle stood at the door. I entered the hall and directed my steps toward the window with the sign *Mezhdunarodnyie telegrammy* (International Telegrams). I had prepared the text of the cable while still at home and had written it in English on one side and in Russian on the other side of the official blank. I also carried cables from Leah, Jurek's mother, to her cousin in Palestine and from pani Rywka to her son somewhere near Tel Aviv also in Palestine. A few customers sending cables to various parts of the world stood in line in front of the window. Of course, none of them was Russian, all were Polish exiles. I thought to myself that the text of each telegram should consist only of three letters: SOS. The clerk counted the number of words in the telegram, looked up the corresponding fee in a table and marked it down on the blank. The customer took it to another window at which the fee was paid and a receipt issued. My NLT (Night Letter Telegram) to Chicago containing 25 words cost 22.5 rubles

From the post office I went to Chapayevska Street where the Polish Embassy used to be at No. 164. It was a small white building. Above the entrance one could still see the spot where the Polish coat of arms, the eagle, had been attached to the wall. Then I walked along Galaktyonovska Street where at No. 62 was the school which had been converted into a dormitory. Many Polish invalids and other Poles used to live there before being sent to the Koshki district. From Galaktyonovska Street, I turned into the tree lined Leo Tolstoy Street, looked at the building which used to house the Polish Military Mission. The three buildings seemed to be occupied now by some offices. I went back to the main street of Kuibyshev.

Not far was a movie house and I noticed to my amazement that it was showing an American film titled "The Song of Russia" with Robert Taylor. A very short line was in front of the box office. Obviously people were afraid even to see an American film because across the street a crowd mobbed the box office of a movie theater which was showing some lousy Soviet film. The plot of "The Song of Russia" must have been extremely poor, because I forgot it as soon as I left the movie house. What struck me, however, was the falsehood presented in that film and it made me understand why communists and communist sympathizers could exist in the U.S. The heroes in the film were all well-dressed, the table in the collective farmer's home was full of delicious food, the tractors were all new and gleaming and their drivers wore clean American style overalls. In a Moscow night club, a Cossack chorus dressed in silk Russian style shirts sang American songs. Total ignorance about the real conditions which existed in the Soviet Union was obvious throughout the movie. The question in my mind was whether this was done on purpose or out of lack of knowledge. My skepticism about the film was shared by a few spectators whom I overheard talking in the lobby.

I returned to the Sznycers' and after supper Galina played the piano while I related to Izaak my impressions about the day's events including my visit with pani Ala. Of course, I did not tell him that she asked me: "Where are you staying? At the 'bourgeois' Sznycer's?" but he himself told me that the chairperson of the Provincial Executive Committee of UPP did not think much of him. It was my last evening in Kuibyshev.

Back To The Collective Farmer's Life

The next morning I got up early, bid farewell to Sznycer and his family and went to the Gypsy Bazaar. The road next to it led straight to Koshki. I sat down in a trench at the side of the road thus joining a crowd of people (primarily women) who waited for the trucks which would drop them off in the villages along the Kuibyshev-Koshki highway. Every few minutes a truck stopped and everybody jumped up to ask about its itinerary. A few people whom the itinerary suited climbed unto the truck's platform and the rest returned to their places waiting for the next truck to stop. This behavior was repeated over and over again, and despite the fact that each truck took away some passengers, the number of those waiting actually increased because each streetcar that arrived at the Gypsy Bazaar discharged a crowd of passengers and many "tourists" among them. Noontime was upon us and it was getting extremely hot. Many trucks stopped to pick up passengers, but none of them was driving to Koshki. I decided to get at least to Yelkhovka or to the "Engels Collective Farm" from where it would be easier to get to Koshki. Izaak Sznycer had told me to come back to the apartment, if I could not get transportation back to the district, but I did not want to take advantage of his hospitality.

Finally at about 5:00 p.m. a truck from the Estonian Machine and Tractor Shop (M & T Shop) which was located close to the "Engels Collective Farm" stopped in front of our group. This time I was lucky, because the truck had to deliver some parts to the Pogruznaya M & T Shop and was going to Koshki. I climbed onto the truck bed and settled myself on top of some metal parts for tractors. The metal parts were sharp and cut into my posterior despite the knapsack which I placed between me and the load. Fortunately, the truck did not break down and had to stop only twice to add water to the radiator so that after midnight I arrived at the "Home of the Collective Farmer" in Koshki. After climbing down with some difficulty and straightening out my numb legs I knocked on the door of the inn. It took at least ten minutes to raise the woman on duty. Since all of the rooms with beds were occupied, I stretched out on the floor of the common room and slept until morning. At dawn I went to Sergeyevka on foot. Upon my return I had to describe my trip in great detail to my aunt. The next morning I returned to work.

Harvesting was in full swing by then and the wheat was being harvested. The weather cooperated and the harvest was big. Consequently, we worked from dawn until dusk and stacked the wheat sheaves at night. Our farmers worked 22 hours a day and I had barely enough time during the dinner break to run to the post office and examine the newspapers. The Allied offensive in France, the Uprising in Warsaw ... The end of the war was in the air but there was no time to think about those events or to dream dreams about the future. My partner on the harvester was old Andrey Kuznetsov and our group, which consisted of the harvester and sixteen women bundling the cut wheat into sheaves, outdid the other three groups and won the coveted Red Banner of our collective. It consisted of a red flag with an inscription in white letters stating that the banner was given to the best group (*zvyeno* in Russian) of the "Clara Tsetkin Collective Farm." Old Kuznetsov tied the banner to our harvester. Whenever some big shot arrived from Koshki, he considered it his duty to say a few "heart-warming" words to our group. As a rule, during such visits the guest whispered a question to Sergey Stepanovich, the chairman of the collective, or to the foreman, Uncle Misha, and when he was answered he would look me over inquisitively. I guessed what those whispers and looks meant. They had to do with our situation and with me being the nephew of that "enemy of the people," who had served as the Director of the Home for Polish Invalids and and who had then been arrested.

One morning when I was leading our three horses from the stable toward our harvester I noticed a group of people standing near it. As I approached I recognized pani Ala, the regional representative of the UPP, who was accompanied by some fellow from Koshki, Anna Pavlovna, the village mayor, the director of Indom and the chairman of our collective farm. I greeted pani Ala, and we exchanged a few pleasantries. She had arrived from Romanovka the previous evening and had spent the night at the Indom director's home. During my dinner break my aunt told me that pani Ala had paid her a visit, and consequently, my aunt had invited her for supper and for the night.

When I arrived home from work that evening pani Ala was already there. We greeted each other warmly. During supper we chatted about nothing in particular. Although I did not inquire about the purpose of pani Ala's visit or about the outcome of her talks with the "communists" in the Indom she brought up the subject herself. She had talked with the director and with Messrs. Kozhukh and Ellengold.

Then she asked my opinion about those individuals. I was noncommittal keeping my true thoughts about them to myself. Pani Ala remarked: "Both gentlemen as well as the director suggested that you should join our organization and complained that you have not done so as yet." I smiled ("They already managed to complain," I thought to myself) and explained to pani Ala that when those two gentlemen consider our family to be "Sosnowski's followers" and "Anders' lackeys" (After the tragic death of Gen Sikorski, Gen. Sosnkowski became the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces in the Western Theater of Operations). When my uncle was unjustly arrested as an "enemy of the Soviet Union," and when the two still spread rumors about us having accumulated immense wealth while working in the Home for Polish Invalids, I could not in good faith work with them even though they represented the UPP in our village.

"My Dear Sir," pani Ala rebutted heatedly, "those gentlemen do not and will not represent our organization in Sergeyevka. Mr. Kozhukh will be the Chairman of the District Executive Committee; Mr. Ellengold will not represent the organization, because he is not liked by the Polish population and cannot even express himself in Polish. I ask you and even suggest that you join the UPP and work with us. It will be regarded in a very positive light by the Soviet authorities considering your and your family's situation. The UPP is an apolitical organization. Our goal is to defeat Nazism and to regain freedom for Poland. Once again I suggest that you agree to join in working with us." "Please understand," pani Ala continued, "we have only a few people working in our organization. Once again I advise you to join and beg you to realize that without a strong UPP the people in your district will not live to see the end of this war. It is not going to end tomorrow or the day after tomorrow." I realized I had no other choice but to join the Union of Polish Patriots. A refusal to join would only emphasize my hostile attitude toward the UPP and indirectly toward the Soviet Union, and would adversely affect the situation of our family as well as my own, and I was still afraid of being arrested. Finally, I agreed to join. Pani Ala breathed easier, but I felt as if I had betrayed myself.

That evening a meeting was to take place in the Indom, and pani Ala asked me to accompany her. I tried to excuse myself by telling her that in the spring of 1943 the NKVD commandant had warned me not to come closer to the Indom than 200 meters (yards). "Don't be silly," pani Ala retorted. "That was during the tenure of the old director. Kozlov (a new director) is a very decent man and harbors no such attitudes toward you. As a matter of fact he very strongly supports your candidacy for membership in the local UPP Executive Committee." We left the cabin and slowly walked toward the Indom. "Madam," I said to pani Ala. "I want to make it quite clear right now that I categorically refuse to accept any leadership position." My announcement took her by surprise, because she had planned to submit my candidacy for the chairmanship of the UPP chapter in Sergeyevka. I explained to pani Ala that I could not be a chairman as a fresh UPP member and also because of the general opinion about my political views. "Oh! Always that 'opinion'!" pani Ala snorted with obvious displeasure. Nevertheless she agreed with me and continued: "But we do not have anyone suitable." I suggested Mr. Ellengold, an individual astute politically and experienced in organizational work but pani Ala rejected my suggestion saying: "His Polish is like that of Krukowski and Lawinski in 'Quid Pro Quo'." (Krukowski and Lawinski were two well-known comedians of Jewish origin who had appeared in the pre-war Warsaw cabaret "Quid Pro Quo" portraying Polish Jews speaking Polish with the peculiar Jewish singsong intonation.) I suggested Mr. Kozhukh, but his candidacy was also rejected because he was slated to become the chairman of the Koshki District Executive. I asked pani Ala who would attend the organizational meeting of the chapter. She mentioned Andrey among others, and it dawned on me at that moment that Andrey should be the chairman of our chapter.

In the summer of 1943 Andrey had been drafted into the Kosciuszko Division and fought in its first battle at Lenino where a land mine had shattered his ankle. After eight months in a hospital Andrey returned to Sergeyevka. He limped and used a cane but the doctors assured him that in time he would walk quite normally. I told pani Ala that in my opinion Andrey should be elected to the chairmanship of Sergeyevka Chapter of the UPP, and I extolled his virtues and merits which was no exaggeration. Andrey was a very nice and decent young man who, unfortunately, had started drinking in the service. However, I warned pani Ala that he was semi-illiterate and could not express himself easily. Although Andrey was a Ukrainian, he used to speak Polish quite well but after returnig from the "Polish Army's" Kosciuszko Division he forgot everything he knew. For his part, Mr. Ellengold could enlighten him politically. Pani Ala beamed: "Great! Andrey will be the chairman, you the vice chairman, ..." At this point I interrupted her by saying: "No! I will be the secretary because nobody here can write correctly in Polish. Let Mr. Kozhukh be

the vice chairman and Mr. Ellengold the treasurer." Pani Ala accepted my suggestion with the proviso that I "would also keep an eye on everything happening." It seemed rather strange that I, supposedly a "fascist" and "Sosnkowski follower," etc. was to watch over a communist Ellengold, a "democrat" Kozhukh and an invalid of the Kosciuszko Division, Andrey. On the other hand being familiar with the conditions in the Soviet Union I realized full well that one of them had been already appointed or would be appointed to watch my doings. The "Patron Saint" of the chapter was to be the Indom director, Kozlov, a member of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks.

The organizational meeting of the Sergeyevka Chapter of the Union of Polish Patriots took place in Mr. Ellengold's room which used to be our kitchen. Mr. Ellengold had tuberculosis and was assigned a separate room. For the first time in 17 months I crossed threshold of what used to be the Home for Polish Invalids. Its residents and especially the children greeted me warmly and joyfully. Nothing much had changed inside. We walked into Mr. Ellengold's room which was lit by a kerosene lamp brought from the director's office for this occasion. The rooms were lit by kerosene lamps without glass chimneys, because it was impossible to procure them at official prices and a glass chimney cost 120 *rubles* on the black market. I greeted those present. Director Kozlov shook my hand and asked: "Your first name, Comrade B.?" When I told him he continued: "I am very pleased to meet you and to have the opportunity to work with you in the future." He then pointed to a chair between pani Ala and himself.

Pani Ala called the meeting to order and proposed the election of a chairperson and a secretary. Director Kozlov proposed that pani Ala chair the meeting and that I be the secretary. Agreement was unanimous, and I immediately started taking notes. Actually only pani Ala and Mr. Ellengold did any talking. Andrey attempted valiantly to get out of chairing the chapter, but we promised him all the help he needed, and he accepted the position. It was decided that the immediate goals for the chapter would be: (1) the recruitment of new members under the slogan "Everybody joins the ranks of the Union of Polish Patriots," and (2) a concerted effort "to democratize and educate Poles in order to prepare cadres of conscientious citizens for a Democratic Poland." After the meeting Director Kozlov asked me to visit the Indom and "to carry out educational activities." I thanked him and promised to see him personally about those matters. Pani Ala stayed that night with us and slept on my plank-bed while I slept on the floor. The next morning Director. Kozlov drove her to Koshki where a *tarantas* waited to take her to Petrovka.

Our collective farm started shipping the harvested grain to the elevator, and consequently, old man Kuznetsov was transferred to sheaf stacking. I was joined again on the harvester by Waclaw. I felt sorry for him because the work was demanding, and Waclaw was badly undernourished. His only food during the spring had been pancakes made out of frozen potatoes left in the fields from the previous fall. Once or twice pani Maria, his wife, baked bread for them from the grain that had remained in the fields under the snow from the previous year's harvest. An epidemic affecting the people who ate that bread had broken out, so she and Waclaw lived on those potato pancakes instead. The pancakes had a rubbery consistency and a musty smell. Steve and I ate them but could not tolerate those "delicacies" for longer than just a few days. So again something was bartered for potatoes and it was back to rationing them for breakfast and dinner. However, Waclaw and pani Maria had nothing to barter, so it was no wonder that he was skinny and dark like the earth which we tilled.

Waclaw had been a taxi driver in Warsaw. He had never worked on a harvester and, on top of everything, was bad when it came to dealing with horses (like every taxi driver!). Once I kidded him about it saying that no wonder Warsaw *droshky* (horse drawn carriages for hire) drivers nicknamed the cabbies "gasoline." The latter ones used to reciprocate by calling the *droshky* drivers "lettuce" and "sack-sharers" (*dzieliworki* Polish, because of the sack with oats which they used to hang from the horse's head while feeding them at a *droshky* stand). Kidding aside, it was imperative that I teach Waclaw his new profession. I told him to take the little seat at the rear end of the platform where with a sweeping move of a two-pronged pitchfork he was to gather the cut wheat from the knife edge of the harvester and push it out of the platform toward the back. I took the front seat and drove the horse team. Waclaw, like every novice on this job, got the pitchfork stuck between the teeth of the moving blade. It was a miracle that we did not break the blade that first day. However, it became extremely blunt and the tips of the pitchfork were cut off.

After our first trip around the field perspiration was dripping from Waclaw's face and his shirt was

soaking wet. "Shall we rest?" He asked meekly. "No." I answered. "But we will change places. Take my seat and drive the horses." Wacław started manacingly cracking the whip and shouting in Polish at the horses. The animals became frightened; each individually jerked the machine which did not budge and one of the horses broke a trace. We got off of the harvester and pushed it back a little to remove the stalks which had become packed between its knives. Because the wheat was very thick and easily clogged the harvester's knives, it had to be cut on the run. I fixed the torn trace, we took our places, Wacław jerked the reins and now the horses pulled the machine evenly. All the time he shouted at the animals at the top of his voice, jerked the reins and cracked the whip. By the end of our trip around the field he was just as tired as when he had been sitting on the platform and racking the cut stalks, except that now he was also hoarse. In the field here and there islets of uncut wheat remained. Usually a harvester was set for the left end of its knives to cut the edge of the grain field when the horse on the right walked in the furrow bordering it. Because Wacław jerked the reins and frightened the horses, they swerved a bit to the left or to the right. In the first case only the right end of the knives cut the stalks whereas in the second case a tract of uncut wheat remained to the left of the harvester and the women binding wheat into sheaves had to pull it out by hand because leaving it would waste grain, imply sabotage and only God knew what else. When the foreman, Uncle Misha, showed up at sunset the women complained to him bitterly that they had gotten worn out pulling the wheat left by the machine. Uncle Misha mollified them by explaining that Wacław would learn the knack in a few days.

The 1944 harvest time and my working with Wacław provided the most pleasant and probably the most sentimental moments of my forced stay in the Soviet Union. Whenever Wacław drove the horses, in our imagination the harvester became a Warsaw taxicab. Wacław became the cabbie, and I a tourist visiting the capital. "Where to?" Wacław asked taking the reins in his left hand and the whip in his right. "We are on the corner of Sienkiewicz and Marszałkowska Streets." I gave some address at the other end of the city. "*A nuka! Druzhno!* (Forward! Together!)" Wacław shouted at the horses, cracked the whip and our "taxi" moved forward to the rattling sound of the oscillating knife while Wacław described the streets and the avenues that we passed in our imagination. When we "approached" some monument, an impressive building or a large store, I asked Wacław various questions which he answered and embellished with stories, historical events, etc. The women binding the cut wheat into sheaves wondered that we had so many things to talk about. "All day long from dawn to the evening the two of them just talk and talk," they used to say smiling and shaking their heads in disbelief.

At the end of August (1944) once again a letter arrived from my uncle in which he wrote that he was in the prison hospital suffering from pellagra, known among the *zaks* which is abbreviated from *zakliuchonnyi* (prisoner in Russian) as "the prison disease", and implored us to bring him fat, sugar, bread, etc., otherwise he would die. We emptied our suitcases of the last valuable things that we owned: a pair of trousers, my aunt's skirt, a blanket, and a bed sheet and we sold them to the miller's wife. That Sunday I went to the market in Koshki and bought butter. Since Aunt Masha paid us in part with wheat flour, my aunt baked white bread which then was made into *zwiebacks*.

The first Saturday in September I packed my knapsack with two cans of clarified butter, a small jar with lard, a sack with *zwiebacks* and a smaller sack with tobacco, and set out for Koshki. In a Kuibyshev market I planned to buy sugar, some smoked fish and two lemons, and for that purpose I took with me 1500 *rubles*. Upon my arrival in Koshki I immediately went to the "Home of the Collective Farmer." I could only get a sleeping place on the floor of the general hall. The woman on duty kept rooms with beds for the "better guests," those who bribed her. Fortunately I bumped into Saul Sznycer and pan Jakub from Petrovka who were also on their way to Kuibyshev. Both gentlemen were those "better guests," had reserved a room for two people and offered to move their two beds together so that the three of us would fit. Since pan Jakub, who had lived on Franciszkanska Street in Warsaw, was more fluent in Russian than Saul Sznycer, who hailed from Pomerania, he came to terms with the woman on duty and arranged for the three of us to occupy a room designed for two people. "Mr. B., don't worry about a car." Saul said to me. "You are going with us." I breathed a sigh of relief. At that time the number of trucks that brought profiteers from Kuibyshev had decreased significantly. Because of the harvest time, most of the trucks had been commandeered by the Party Committees for hauling grain from the collective farms to the elevators and to the government warehouses. The bazaars were also smaller because the farmers were busy threshing the grain and were forbidden to attend the bazaars. The unauthorized visiting of a bazaar could result in a 3-5 year prison sentence for truancy.

All afternoon I helped pan Jakub and Saul Sznycer carry their purchases of butter and honey from the market to the apartment of one of the Polish families living in Koshki. That evening we pushed the two beds together and slept comfortably through the night. Sunday morning we went to the market where both gentlemen continued to buy the various food products available until the sales people began to drift away. We returned to the inn and began to load the purchases into the same bus I had taken to Kuibyshev a month earlier. The driver, his mistress and several Kuibyshev profiteers, who had come for the bazaar, seemed to know pan Jakub and Saul Sznycer quite well and were even on a first name basis with them. Once again we were packed into the bus like sardines, the only difference being that this time it was not as stuffy or hot as during my previous trip because the summer was coming to an end. The trip to Kuibyshev was uneventful and at dusk the bus stopped in front of Izaak Sznycer's apartment. Under the cover of darkness we unloaded the goods brought from Koshki. Izaak's in-laws were away in a resort near Kuibyshev, so there was no problem with the sleeping arrangements.

Next morning we got up very early. Saul was in a hurry to see pan Jakub, who had stayed somewhere nearby, and to meet his "customers." I had to go to Bezimianka to see my uncle. It was not easy to find the prison camp and the hospital. The only information I had was "Bezimianka Camp No. 8." Asking directions to the camp was dangerous and could lead to dire consequences such as being suspected of espionage because the whole area was full of factories producing munitions, airplanes and the latest Soviet weapon, Katyusha rocket batteries. Numerous legends circulated about this new "miracle" weapon but most importantly the Germans dreaded it and whenever a battery was surrounded by the enemy, the crew blew up the battery and themselves with it. In his letter my uncle wrote that I should take the Bezimianka streetcar to the end of the line and then ask directions. The beginning of the Bezimianka line was at the Gypsy Bazaar which I could reach by a streetcar running along Red Army Street a half a block from Izaak's apartment. I shouldered my 17-pound knapsack and started on my way. This time I was not worried about being stopped by a militiaman, because I carried a Union of Polish Patriots membership card in my pocket. Pani Ala had mentioned during her last visit to Sergeyevka that on several occasions she had had to bail out members of the Union who managed to trespass into out of bounds areas while wandering through the city.

On the streetcar on Red Army Street I encountered my first difficulty in using this means of transportation in the Soviet Union. The streetcar, which consisted of the engine car and a trailer, was packed with people so tightly that one expected it to burst at any minute. By sheer miracle I managed to "board" it by grabbing a handle with both hands and placing one foot on the step while the other one was hanging in the air. At the next stop I did not have to worry any more about falling off of the step, because a new wave of passengers pushed me inside of the car. There was no way whatsoever for me to put my hand in my pocket to take out 20 *kopeks* for the fare and hand it to the conductress. By the time I finally managed to get the coin, I already found myself at the front exit. Passengers were being constantly propelled from the rear entrance to the front exit and it took a lot of effort not to be swept out of the streetcar by the wave of passengers at a stop where one did not have any need or desire to get off.

Finally I managed to look around the streetcar. It was old and narrow with a long bench along each side. The conductress who was dressed in shabby clothes and had a filthy babushka on her head, stood on one of the benches at the entrance to the car and shouted: "Citizens! Pay the fare!" A canvas money bag for the money hung from her neck and a roll of tickets each the size of a postage stamp was attached to one of the straps with a piece of string. Passengers squeezed me from all sides and did not have a chance to purchase their tickets. One man in work clothes took a one-ruble bill out and asked "Comrades! Who has change?" Each of three passengers and myself gave him 20 *kopeks*. Then the owner of the one-ruble bill handed it to his neighbor saying: "Please pass it on to the conductress." This one handed it to his neighbor with the same request until the bill reached the conductress. After a while by the same route but in the opposite direction a strip of paper containing five tickets reached the owner of the one-ruble bill who now asked around: "Who gave me change?" and handed the individual tickets to each answering person. I had to admit that nobody cheated but, on the other hand, many did not pay their fare either. Quite a few of the other passengers bought their tickets in a similar way, and there was a constant din going on inside the streetcar.

Not far from the end of the line at the Gypsy Bazaar I was pushed onto the front platform. The

streetcar was operated by a middle-aged woman with a lot of make-up and her hair in tiny curls. She operated the car very deftly but as soon as a cart pulled by a horse or a donkey found itself unexpectedly on the track, the woman let out a tirade of the most elaborate insults which were enough to make one's ears wilt. The driver of the cart usually did not remain silent and the resulting verbal duel went on for a few minutes to the delight of the passengers. The street pavement was full of holes, and the streetcar tracks stuck out above its surface; it was no wonder that the carts could not always get rapidly out of the way before the approaching streetcar.

At the Gypsy Bazaar I transferred to a streetcar line going from the city to Bezimianka. Now the situation was different from the one in the previous streetcar, because the passengers did not move from the entrance to the exit during the trip. Most were traveling to the end of the line and those people occupied both benches. The passengers getting off before the end of the line stood on both platforms or hung on the steps, buffers and similar places where there were some protuberances which they could hold and sufficient space to place firmly at least the tip of one shoe. Finally the streetcar started on its five-mile journey which lasted over an hour. Several times it had to climb small hills. During those moments it moved at a snail's pace and gave the impression of not being able to make it and rolling backwards instead. Somehow that did not happen, but at one point while climbing one hill the poor streetcar just could not make it to the top. The woman driver put on the brakes and turned to the passengers imploring them: "Citizens! Help a little. Otherwise you will be late for work and get punished for truancy." The passengers hanging around the platforms and on the steps got off and started pushing the car singing in unison according to the Russian custom: *Raz, dva, vzyali! Yeshcho vzyali!* ("One, two, push! Once again push!"). The streetcar moved a few yards and again stopped. "Hold it! You s.o.b.'s!," shouted the driver. A voice yelled: *A nuka, grazhdanye! Davayte, druzhno vazmyom!* ("Hey, citizens! Let's do it together!"). From somewhere a tenor started a song: *Yeshcho malenkiy razok, da vzyali!* (Once more a little bit, together!"). The car moved again to the beat "One, two, push! Once again push!" and found itself on the top of the hill. The "dismounted" passengers jumped back to their spots and the streetcar rolled wildly downhill, squeaking, tossing from side to side and making a horrendous racket.

Finally we reached the end of the line, the Bezimianka Circle. I alighted together with the remaining passengers and looked around with no particular curiosity, so as not to arouse anyone's suspicion with its dire consequences, namely being arrested. As far as the eye could see there were factory smokestacks and barbed wire fences with watchtowers manned by armed soldiers. Here and there four-story buildings lined the streets near the end of the streetcar line. They were grey, frequently unplastered or partially plastered. The majority of the buildings, however, consisted of one-story wooden barracks. The traffic on the main highway leading to Kuibyshev and on Bezimianska Street, the main street which was perpendicular to the highway, was beyond description. Trucks full of sacks, scrap iron or prisoners guarded by armed NKVD troopers rushed in all directions passing the peasant wagons loaded with hay, grain or potatoes, frightening the horses and oxen. So, this was the dreaded Bezimianka, the scourge of the Russians in the Kuibyshev, as well as in the neighboring provinces. This was the center of the airplane industry in the Central Soviet Union, where over a million mobilized workers, peasants and youths worked in factories. I remembered the miller, Uncle Peter, once said: "Bezimianka is a continuous concentration camp, erected with the blood and sweat of the Russian people on the bones of our brothers and sisters."

I decided to ask a militiaman directing traffic at the nearest crossing about "Camp No. 8." "I don't know," he said. "The place is full of them. Walk along the highway and ask someone in the guardhouse of the first camp you encounter. Maybe they will know." I followed his advice and marched along the winding highway leading from Kuibyshev to the nearest village, Zubovka. The passing trucks were raising clouds of dust which was getting into my eyes, nostrils and mouth. Quite frequently I was passed by trucks full of German prisoners of war. They were squatting on the floors of the platforms, redheads and blonds in greyish-green uniforms, examples of the "Super Race." Bezimianka was just the right place for them! In the distance several yards away on the left-hand side of the highway, I spotted the first camp and directed myself toward it. The sun was beating down mercilessly and the knapsack was cutting into my back. An NKVD trooper and his colleagues in the guardhouse were of no help but theirs was not "Camp No. 8." "Maybe it is the one over there." He pointed to some watchtowers about 300 yards in the distance. I went in that direction but again without success. And so marching from one camp to another for three hours I still could not find "Camp No. 8." As I walked along a path through a field in the direction of an

embankment with a railroad track on it and with some wooden watchtowers visible behind it, an older woman walked in front of me carrying a basket with food which I guessed was for a prisoner. "Auntie," I asked, "Maybe you know where 'Camp No. 8 is?'" "Of course," She said. "It is the one behind the railroad track. Go over the embankment and walk along the fence to the highway. Then turn right and you will see the guardhouse."

I followed her directions and in a few minutes found myself in front of the gate leading into the camp. To the side of it was a guardhouse. The whole camp was surrounded by a double fence of barbed wire. One could see many barracks inside. A few prisoners were sitting in the front of some of the barracks. A trooper stepped out of the guardhouse and shouted: "We will accept packages at 2:00 p.m. For now just sit and wait. Don't come up until we call you. And no loitering!" A wooden box with shovels, brooms, etc. stood on the edge of a trench across the road from the guardhouse. I decided to wait until two o'clock and sat down next to it in the little shade it provided. The sun was beating down mercilessly and it could not have been more than 1:00 p.m. when on the road leading from the train station an armed guard escorting a prisoner showed up. When they approached the gate I noticed that the prisoner was supporting his right forearm with his left hand. He must have stuck his right hand into some piece of machinery because his wrist was a pulp of crushed flesh and bones. A camp guard opened the gate and let the victim in with his guardian-angel. After a while a shiny black limousine with a young NKVD major accompanied by a woman stopped in front of the gate. The camp guard opened the gate and saluted smartly. The car drove in raising clouds of dust. From bits and pieces of the conversation among the guards sitting outside the guardhouse and enjoying the sun, I gathered that the officer was the camp commandant and the woman was his wife.

In the meantime the number of people waiting to deliver packages to prisoners increased, and I turned my attention to a tall grey-haired woman about sixty years old who was standing to the side away from the others. Suddenly the phone rang in the guardhouse and we could hear a trooper saying into it: "Yes, Sir, Comrade Commandant!" He hung up and ran outside with the other troopers shouting: "Get on the other side of the road! Hurry! Hurry!" Two guards grabbed a small speaker's platform standing next to the wall of the guardhouse and placed it a few feet away from it. While moving to the other side of the road I found myself next to the grey-haired woman. "Again they are bringing some poor souls in." She remarked sadly. "My husband has been confined to the prison hospital for a year. He is a physician himself but at 68 years of age he will not make it."

Our conversation was interrupted because two trucks full of prisoners pulled up to the gate. "Alight!" The escort shouted. The prisoners, dark-faced and bearded, with shaved heads and in tattered wraps slowly climbed down. A young boy turned toward us. "Johnny! Baby!" a peasant woman cried out next to me. A trooper shouted to him to get in line ready to hit the boy with a rifle butt. "I have not seen him in a year and a half. They came at night and took him. My God, how dark and skinny he is!" the woman lamented. "You get dark, for sure, on government rations and you won't get fat either," a mustachioed peasant remarked offhandedly.

The prisoners each holding a bundle with their personal possessions, which included a wooden spoon and a canteen, formed a column in front of the lectern. The camp commandant was accompanied by a younger officer and each strutted proudly like a peacock, with gold-braided shoulder straps, shiny buttons and chests full of medals. They came out of the gate and climbed onto the platform from which the commandant delivered his "welcoming address" to the prisoners. Unfortunately, I could not hear its content because the wind was blowing in the opposite direction. Then the gate was opened and the column marched inside. "Johnny! Darling!" the peasant woman shouted and ran toward the prisoners. A trooper with a rifle restrained her. The commandant looked at the scene with a bored expression on his face. "Don't accept a package from her today. Maybe the bitch will learn how to behave!" he shouted toward the guardhouse and boarded his car which sped out onto the highway. The guards put the speaker's platform back in its place and we returned to our places around the wooden box with the brooms.

Shortly before 2:00 p.m. we were called individually into the guardhouse where a guard marked down the names of the prisoners on pieces of paper. When my turn came I gave my uncle's first and last names and asked if I would be able to visit with him for a few minutes, because my uncle had applied to

the camp commandant for a visitation. I also explained to the guard that my uncle was in the hospital. "Under what article is he sentenced?" the soldier asked. "Fifty eight." I answered. "That Article does not permit visitations," the soldier said. "He is 'political.'" When the names had been collected from all of the waiting people, the trooper sent a messenger, a thirteen-year old youngster who was sentenced to year's imprisonment for being late to work, to call the prisoners to the guardhouse. Half an hour later they gathered behind the camp gate. Each prisoner tried to exchange a few words with those waiting outside but the guards did not permit any talking and threatened to take away the packages or not to deliver them at all. The visitors were individually called to the guardhouse where the contents of each parcel were examined and then handed to the prisoner standing behind the doors.

By three o'clock all of the other visitors had been processed and left while I was still waiting. The heat was unbearable, and I felt as if my blood was boiling in my veins. The young messenger came up to me and said: "Your brother will come soon. He is very seriously ill and is confined to the hospital. He is getting dressed." I took a can with tobacco out of my pocket and emptied it into the boy's hand. I also gave him a piece of folded newspaper. He looked at me gratefully and thanked me. Then he returned to the guardhouse and treated each of the soldiers. One of them came out and said to me: "You! Sit down here! The sun is hot out there like in a desert!" I sat down on the threshold of the guardhouse. After a few minutes during which the troopers asked me about my life on the collective farm, the harvest, etc., the messenger announced that my "brother" had arrived.

One of the soldiers called my uncle inside the guardhouse, and he entered leaning on a male nurse who accompanied him. He looked terrible and had a shaved head, a moustache which he had grown to cover the ringworm he had picked up in prison, and a puffed grey face which looked more like a melon covered with dirt than like a human face. His hands were swollen and so were his ankles. The guard who started checking the contents of cans and satchels asked my uncle if he had received the permission for a visitation. No, he had not, but the soldier said: "That's OK. The two of you can talk." My uncle asked about his wife, about Kathy, about our life, etc. "I am getting better," he said with a faint smile, "but I was on my deathbed." We talked in Russian while the soldier sliced the bread into pieces to make sure that there was no message hidden inside. Then he removed the clarified butter from the can using a dirty rusty knife. Next he opened the sack with the tobacco and stuck his hand inside to check that nothing had been hidden in there. "*Khoroshyi tabachok* (good tobacco)." He said and put two fistfuls into his pants pocket. "Take some more," my uncle said. "No. That's enough," he said. My uncle transferred everything I had brought for him to a sack that he had with him and handed it to the nurse. "I have no strength to carry it," he said and asked me to bring him the next day a smoked fish, a few eggs and about two lemons. He also asked me to leave him a few hundred *rubles* in the guardhouse in his account so that he would be able to buy the milk brought to the camp by peasant women. We said goodbye. I stopped at the gate and looked back. My uncle walked slowly toward the hospital barracks leaning on the nurse and barely able to drag his feet. He wore only underwear and a blanket over his shoulders. My uncle looked in my direction, waived his hand and then wiped his eyes. He was obviously crying. When I walked to the streetcar stop I could not get the picture of my uncle out of my mind. After being squeezed for two hours in packed streetcars, I returned to the Sznycers' home. Even though they were finished with dinner, Galina set the table for me, and while dining I had to report on my visit to Bezimianka.

The next morning I went to the Ilyinka Bazaar, not far from the Sznycers' apartment, to do the shopping for my uncle. Galina, Izaak's sister-in-law, had to do some shopping for the household and offered to accompany me. Despite the early hour the bazaar, located in a square bordered by four streets, was already full of people. Some merchants and peasants arranged their wares in stands or on tables, but the majority sat on the ground guarding the goods spread out in front of them. In one part of the bazaar dairy products, meat and sausages were sold in the stands. A variety of fruits ranging from apples to oranges, mandarin oranges and lemons was exhibited on tables in another part of the bazaar with the sellers standing next to the tables. Those selling breads and clothes carried their merchandise, while shoes, hardware and household goods were spread out on the ground with the sellers squatting next to their goods. Baked goods ranging from black ration bread to white wheat rolls, pies, cookies and cakes were also for sale. In one corner of the bazaar one could purchase cigarette lighters, foreign flints and tobacco products ranging from Russian home grown makhorka to the luxury Russian cigarettes *Deli* and *Kazbek*, to some Iranian brands and ending up with American *Wings* and *Chesterfield*. The prices were so high that several thousand rubles could be spent for a two-day supply of provisions for one

family.

As a matter of fact Galina spent over a thousand rubles. For my uncle I bought two lemons (70 *rubles*), two pounds of sugar cubes (120 *rubles*), two pounds of white bread (100 *rubles*), five hard boiled eggs (50 *rubles*), two boxes of *Tachanka* cigarettes (10 *rubles*) and two smoked herrings (30 *rubles*). Altogether I spent 380 *rubles*; i.e. a half a month's wages for a highly qualified worker. It was quite obvious that the same worker could not afford to buy two pounds of butter (500 *rubles*), two pounds of meat (200 *rubles*) and two pounds of sugar (120 *rubles*), because he would have spent a month's pay for six pounds of food. I was certain that among the people milling in the bazaar none came to do their shopping with the money they earned from working. Fifty percent were profiteers and the remaining fifty percent were thieves. As a matter of fact Izaak's family engaged in profiteering. They sold ration bread through "agents" who showed up as soon as the rations were brought home. For the money so obtained plus the thousands from Izaak father-in-law's "deals," they bought their food products and bread in the bazaar.

As far as the thieves were concerned, I saw two examples of their activity. Galina was buying rolls when a thief stole two loaves of white bread from a woman at the next stall. She raised hell and immediately a militiaman showed up (I forgot to mention that the bazaar was full of uniformed militiamen, as well as just as many in civilian clothes). "What happened?" he asked. "A boy stole two loaves of bread from this woman," some woman offered an explanation. "There he is running," she added, pointing the thief out to the militiaman who started making his way through the gathered crowd. A fifteen-year old boy standing next to the helpful witness said to her: "You ,Citizen, are very smart," and made a motion with his hand as if he wanted to stroke her face. The woman issued a terrifying shriek, and the boy disappeared in the crowd leaving the "helpful witness" with her face cut from the forehead through the eye and cheek up to the lower jaw. He was one of the gang and took his revenge using a razor blade held between his fingers.

The second example of the thieves' activity, I saw when I was leaving the bazaar with Galina. We were following a peasant carrying an oddly shaped sack on his back. The shape of the sack indicated to me that it was full of watermelons. In a while I had the opportunity to confirm my supposition. A little ragamuffin no more than twelve years old suddenly appeared between us and the peasant, and in a flash had cut the peasant's sack with a razor blade. The melons spilled onto the ground and were immediately snatched up by the boy's partners. By the time the peasant had managed to turn around in the crowd, facing Galina and me with an utterly bewildered expression on his face, there was no trace of the boys or of the melons.

"What about the militia?" the reader may wonder at this point. Well, the militiamen were only after those profiteers, merchants and thieves who did not pay them off or the drunks who openly and loudly expressed their hostility toward the Soviet regime. Although the trading in bread, flour and grain was strictly prohibited and severely punished, the militiamen were blind to that breach of the law. When a militiaman approached a merchant selling bread the latter turned his/her back to the cop. An ostrich hides its head thinking nobody sees it. In the case of Soviet militiamen and illegal trading this "ostrich policy" worked extremely well.

I went straight from the bazaar to Bezimianka. This time I had no difficulty in finding my way to the camp. After waiting an hour in front of the guardhouse under the burning rays of the sun, a male nurse brought my uncle. However, the guards did not let him inside the building, so I gave the things that I had bought for him to one of the guards. Through the same guard, my uncle returned some metal cans which would come in handy in the future for sending him butter or other fats. We exchanged a few words shouting across the gate until the guard chased me away.

After returning to the city I decided to stand on the rear platform of the streetcar in order to cool off a little in the wind. Not far from the Gypsy Bazaar, I suddenly felt I was going to faint and saw red spots in front of my eyes. When the car stopped I could not see anything, and so I literally slid off of the platform by feeling my way, stepped on the sidewalk and fell down unconscious. After a few minutes I recovered, got up and went inside the nearest building surprised that no curious crowd had gathered around me. Evidently the sight of a human being lying on the street was nothing unusual in Kuibyshev.

The one-story wooden building must have housed some office. Despite the beastly heat the men working there wore caps, a custom universal in all of the Soviet offices at least in those years. I asked if I could have a drink of water. One of the women pointed to a bucket in the corner of the room. I scooped some water with a metal can from some American canned food. The water was turgid and not fresh. I stepped out on the porch and stretched out on a bench. Although the clerks saw me through the window none bothered to come out and ask if there was anything wrong with me. Indeed human life was meaningless in the Soviet Union. Frequently I heard a remark that "one human being is unimportant in a country which has over 180 million of them." Throughout the years after leaving the Soviet Union and being in the United States where every life is precious, I have often wondered whether or not that Soviet attitude has changed in the face of the 21 million dead the Soviet Union lost in the Great Patriotic War.

After resting I went to the Gypsy Bazaar and squeezed myself into a streetcar taking me to the city. That morning I had made arrangements with Izaak to meet him in the office of the Union of Polish Patriots. When I was in Kuibyshev the first time pani Ala had talked contemptuously about Izaak as "that bourgeois Sznycer." However, as soon as Izaak reported to the UPP's office, he was appointed to be the Technical Secretary of the Kuibyshev Province UPP. The organization's office consisted of a small room located on the ground floor of a building on Kuibyshev Street behind a block of buildings housing the NKVD. When I entered the office Izaak was out on some official business in one of the Soviet offices, so I talked with pani Ala. She asked me if I had seen my uncle, about my aunt, about the news from the district, about the needs of the Polish population in our district, etc. After a few minutes Izaak returned from his errand, so I took a few membership cards for the new members in our district, said goodbye to pani Ala and went home with Izaak.

On the way home Izaak told me about his work in the organization. He had already made excellent contacts in various Soviet offices with which he had to deal and, as he was shamelessly bragging, was able to "make some useful food ration coupon arrangements." I was unimpressed by Izaak's bragging, by my conversation with pani Ala, and by the UPP's office. Unquestionably Izaak's position and his being able to deal with the various officials had turned his head. Personally, I felt an aversion to pani Ala. She seemed basically to be a hostile person, and I intuitively sensed that she regarded our family as bourgeoisie, fascists, enemies of the proletariat and of the Soviet system, and only God knew what else, but she hid her true feelings behind hypocrisy. "Chekistka (a female member of the Cheka, the predecessor of NKVD)," I summed up my opinion of pani Ala to Izaak in one succinct word.

As far as the office of the Kuibyshev UPP was concerned, it looked like any other Soviet office except that instead of portraits of the Bolshevik leaders decorating every wall, the portraits of Lenin and Stalin hung only on one wall under a slogan which read "Long Live Soviet-Polish Friendship" which was painted with red paint on the glued together pages of old newspapers. A second wall was decorated with the portraits of the Polish heroes Kosciuszko, Gen. Dabrowski and Jan Kilinski who were considered kosher at that time by the Polish and Soviet authorities. The portraits of Bierut, Osobka-Morawski, Gen. Zymierski and a slogan reading "Long Live the Polish Committee of National Liberation" hung on the third wall. Since the fourth wall was actually only a partition made of plywood, it had a "wall bulletin," an inevitable part of every Soviet office. Because newsprint and, consequently, newspapers were in short supply in the Soviet Union, those "wall bulletins" served as the substitutes for Pravda, Izvestya and other papers. The articles written in the "wall bulletin" hanging in the UPP office were of an unusually poor quality. Furthermore, they were written in such poor Polish both stylistically and orthographically that I could not resist calling pani Ala's attention to those obvious shortcomings.

The next morning I bid goodbye to Izaak's family and took a streetcar to the Gypsy Bazaar. After a relatively short wait I hopped a truck going to Koshki. That same evening tired and covered with dust I arrived at the "Home of the Collective Farmer." This time I was lucky, because the woman on duty recognized me as Saul Sznycer's friend and assigned me to a room with beds and bedding, (a dirty pillow, a torn bedsheet and a thin blanket). That night in the "Home" did not differ from any of the other ones I had spent there. I slept, because I was dead tired. I still had to chase away the bedbugs which climbed the walls onto the ceiling, crawling along it to where they felt the heat rising from my body and then parachuted straight down on me.

The next morning I splashed my face with cold water, shouldered my bundle and started walking to

Sergeyevka. I did not encounter any wagons going in that direction. In the morning they traveled toward Koshki, in the afternoon in the opposite direction, and rarely took on passengers either way. After a three-hour walk, I crossed the threshold of our cabin. I had hardly managed to catch my breath when my aunt started bombarding me with a barrage of questions. On my way between Koshki and Sergeyevka, I had planned on how to cover up at least partially the horrendous impression my uncle's condition had made on me. I answered the hundreds of her questions and that afternoon I went out to weed our potato patch. Once again the work in the fields made each day similar to the previous one.

One day Nina, the millers' daughter, stopped in to inquire about my trip to Kuibyshev and to invite me to a party at their home that coming Saturday evening. The occasion was Nina's reaching adulthood. Although I enjoyed visiting the millers and talking with Aunt Masha, this time I tried to get out of the invitation, because I did not feel like partying. I also anticipated the presence of the "local dignitaries." Nina begged me to come for the sake of our friendship and because she assured me that only young people had been invited. I agreed to go. Saturday evening I put on my "holiday trousers," the "Eisenhower jacket," took a pair of pink panties as a gift for Nina and went to the mill. The cabin was brightly illuminated by two kerosene lamps. Their dog, a little mutt left by the German colonists, greeted me with a loud bark. Nina came out, chased away the dog, gave me a big kiss, took my hand in hers and led me inside. The guests had all arrived so we sat down at the table. There were ten people including Aunt Masha, Uncle Peter and Lisa, their daughter-in-law.

End of the Manuscript.

Epilogue (and explanation of "End of the Manuscript")

The repatriations of Polish exiles from the Soviet Union began as soon as Poland was ready to accept them. Not all of those who held Polish citizenship prior to outbreak of World War II were repatriated to Poland. The Ukrainians and the Belorussians could return only to the territories annexed by the Soviet Union on September 17, 1939. Unless the head of the family or another close member of it (the son or daughter) had served in the UPP's Polish Army they had no choice.

Even before any preparations for repatriation of the Poles from our village began, several children, who hailed from the eastern territories of Poland, which were incorporated into the Soviet Union following the Yalta Agreement, left for home. The parents who survived the war came to claim their children as soon as travel between those territories and the Soviet Union was restored. None of the Jewish children was so lucky. Their parents perished. Only one little girl was found by a cousin and taken home by him.

In our village I was asked by the Soviet authorities to conduct the registration of the Polish exiles to be repatriated. Among those eligible to return to Poland I was the only member of the Polish population, who was respected and trusted by both the Polish exiles and the Soviet authorities, who was familiar with the written Russian language, and with the regulations established by the Soviet authorities for the repatriation.

Even before I started the registration, Batyushka Oszmianski was after me to make sure that I place his name on the repatriation roster. Both he and I knew full well that it would have been against the regulations governing the eligibility for the repatriation, because the priest was a Belorussian. Frankly, I suspected a provocation on his part designed to make me overstep the official regulations. I stalled by being diplomatic and avoided registering him.

One day a girl who worked in the village mayor's office came to our cabin with the message that someone from the district NKVD wanted to see me. When I arrived at the office, Father Oszmianski was there talking with the former director of the Indom, who had been assigned to the district NKVD headquarters. I sat down on a bench waiting my turn and, inadvertently, overheard the following conversation between the two of them. "Well, Old Man (*starik* in Russian), when will you open the church in Shantala. The authorities in Kuibyshev are bugging me. Their patience, as well as mine, has limits, you know!" The priest answered meekly: "I want to return to my family, but he (pointing his finger at me) refuses to register me." "Look here, Old Man! You will not go home. I will arrange to have your family brought here. I will also get for you all the vestments, icons and other religious items that you will need. Just open that damn church!"

The priest tried another ploy by saying that the church was being used as a granary, but the NKVD man said curtly: "All the grain has been removed, the inside cleaned, and the whole building whitewashed inside and outside. I checked it myself on the way here. So, no more excuses! Is that clear?!" It became clear to the batyushka that his fate was sealed, and he left the room. We had heard and read in the press about "the permission of limited religious activity," and I realized that I was witnessing its happening in our district.

My "audience" with the NKVD man was brief and to the point. He asked how the registration was progressing and reminded me about not registering Ukrainians and Belorussians, and especially Father Oszmianski.

There was also a problem regarding the status of Mendelek and his sister, Gusta, because their ages did not fall into the "adult" category (18 years and older), or the "children" category (14 years and younger). Consequently, they could not be registered for repatriation in either category. Kozlov, the Indom director, was very perturbed by the status of these two children.

Shortly after he had taken over the directorship of the Indom, Kozlov came to our cabin, introduced himself to my aunt (I was at work at that time), and said to her: "Madam, I have heard about what befell your husband. I have also heard that my predecessor prohibited you, your nephew and Steve from visiting the residents of the Indom, and Kathy from playing with the children. When I was imprisoned in

1936-37 (during Stalin's purges - MLB), my children were ostracized and had to walk to school 5 km (more than 3 miles), because nobody would give them a lift regardless of the weather. So I know full well what you are going through, and how Kathy must feel. Please permit Kathy to come and play with the children, and all of you should disregard the orders of my predecessor."

Now at the registration time, Kozlov and I joined forces to clarify the situation in which Mendelek and Gusta found themselves, so that they would leave with the rest of us, and not become stranded in the Soviet Union. He tried to intercede with the Soviet authorities to have the two of them registered in one of the categories. I, on my part, tried to get some directives from the Union of Polish Patriots through pani Ala, the Union's representative in Kuibyshev, but to no avail.

Finally, on the day of our departure, March 23, 1946, all of the Polish exiles in Sergeyevka and numerous other nearby villages were transported to the Pogruznaya railroad station in the collective farms' wagons. On the one hand, the Poles were happy to leave the dread of the Soviet life behind them. On the other hand, they realized that they would miss and never see again those Russians, Chuvashes, Tatars and Mordvins, without whose friendship and help their lives on the collective farms would have been so much more difficult. There were plenty of tearful farewells! For us it was extremely difficult and sad to part with the miller's family.

When the residents of the Indom left for the train station, Mendelek and Gusta were the only ones who remained behind. However, Kozlov had told them to be ready to leave at a moment's notice, because he was determined to have them leave with the transport.

While the exiles were boarding the train's cattle cars, Kozlov told the engineer that the transport was not to leave the station until he (Kozlov) brings travel documents from Koshki. Actually this order was a delaying tactic on his part, so that he could once again contact the NKVD and the UPP authorities in Kuibyshev, and obtain a clarification of Mendelek's and Gusta's status. His attempt failed. Now Kozlov took matters in his own hands, which was unheard in the Soviet Union. He phoned his deputy at the Indom, and told him to immediately load both children in a tarantas and drive them to a place not far west from Sergeyevka where the trains usually slowed down to drop off and pick up sacks with mail. Then Kozlov returned to the Pogruznaya station, gave the engineer the travel documents, and told him to proceed slowly for a "pick up" at the usual place. When the transport arrived there, the deputy director had been already waiting with the two children. He pushed them through the open door of one of the cars, and the train picked up speed. Neither child had any papers, but it did not matter. What mattered was that they were on their way to freedom, and to a life full of possibilities.

When the preparations for repatriation started, my aunt went to Bezimianka to see her husband and to ask him whether or not she and Kathy should stay in the Soviet Union and wait for the end of his imprisonment. He was adamantly against it and told her that she would accomplish more for him in Poland. We left Sergeyevka in a transport with the other Poles from the Koshki district on March 23, 1946. My uncle remained behind. Many years later when communism collapsed in the Soviet Union and various archives were opened, Kathy found out that her father had died in prison on March 6, 1952.

Our transport went straight to the Western Territories newly acquired by Poland from which the Germans had been expelled. Shortly after our arrival, we moved to Gdansk where my aunt's only sister and niece had settled after having been liberated from the Stutthof concentration camp by the Red Army. I promptly contacted my American relatives and with their intercession was able to get a transit visa to Sweden. I left Poland for Sweden by ferry on September 6, 1946. In Sweden I received an immigration visa to the United States and arrived in New York on January 14, 1947.

At that time my relatives lived in the Washington, DC, area, and they immediately enrolled me in the Americanization School operated by the Daughters of the American Revolution to get a crash course in English. Upon the successful completion of the course I was accepted into the pharmacy program at the University of Illinois in Chicago. With quite a bit of spare time on my hands between my arrival in Washington and my departure for Chicago I decided to jot down some of my war experiences in Polish. My studies, both undergraduate and graduate, my family, and my career in academia put an end to this endeavor. Shortly before retiring from teaching I decided to translate the unfinished manuscript into

English for my daughters to have as a record of the experiences which formed an important part of my life and influenced me greatly. Both Louise and Susan have been most helpful in editing the first translated manuscript.

For a very short time after my arrival in the Washington area I corresponded with Nina. Both of us realized that it was dangerous for her to write abroad, and so we stopped our correspondence. After the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union, my cousin Kathy started inquiries about the ultimate fate of her father. At the same time she managed to get Nina's address. Since that time I have been corresponding with Nina on a regular basis even though my Russian has become somewhat rusty.

Through the years I have kept in close touch and have occasionally been able to see Gusta and Mendelek (Gustava and Mendy, no more children, of course!). Both she and her brother settled in Canada. Last time I saw the two of them and Mendy's wife was in August 1994. He died at the end of that year.

I returned to Poland accompanied by my wife and my two daughters in the summer of 1967 for the first time since I had left the country in 1946. During my visit I saw Joe, the dentist, and his family. We reminisced about the "good old days" when we slaved as ditch diggers and lumberjacks. Shortly after our meeting Joe and his family left for Israel.

I have kept in close touch with Kathy, living in Poland with her husband and married daughter. I have lost contact with the other people I knew during my stay in the Soviet Union but Kathy keeps in touch with a couple of her former playmates. I often wonder how the lives of all those people turned out and suspect that none of them has been as fortunate as I have.

